

Marriage, religious vows don't limit freedom, papal preacher says

VATICAN CITY - The unbreakable bonds of marriage and the permanence of religious vows do not place artificial constraints on the freedom to love; rather they free a person to love forever, in good times and bad, said the preacher of the papal household.

Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa continued his Friday Lenten meditations for top Vatican officials March 20 even though Pope Benedict XVI and his closest collaborators were in Africa.

Focusing on the writings of St. Paul about the Holy Spirit, the papal preacher looked specifically at the meaning of the passage from the Letter to the Romans: "For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you from the law of sin and death."

If Christ's death and resurrection and the descent of the Holy Spirit have freed people from the law, he said, "what sense do the Code of Canon Law, monastic rules, religious vows" and the church's insistence on the indissolubility of marriage have?

"Jesus said he did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it," the Capuchin said.

What the Holy Spirit adds to the law is life-giving love, he said.

"People today increasingly ask: What relationship there could be between the love of two young people and laws regarding matrimony, and what need does love have to bind itself when it is naturally free and spontaneous," he said.

If two people are really in love, Father Cantalamessa said, they do not see a promise to love each other forever as a burden, but as a joy.

"This consideration is valid not only for human love, but also for divine love," he said. "One could ask, 'Why should one make a commitment to loving God, submitting to a religious rule, taking vows that force him or her to be poor, chaste and obedient?'"

The reason is that, “in a moment of grace, you felt attracted by God, you loved him and wanted to be with him forever, totally, and fearing that you might lose him because of your own instability, you bound yourself to him to guarantee your love,” he said.

Religious vows and marriage vows help keep people steady through difficult times, guaranteeing that when the crisis is over, the relationship will still be firm, Father Cantalamessa said.