

CCEE Commission for Family & Life, Bucharest 8-10 May

Opening remarks of Archbishop Leo Cushley

President, Commission for Family & Life

We gather here in this beautiful monastery not far from Bucharest for the second face to face conference organised by the Family & Life Commission of the CCEE. We gather here in these days under the banner “‘Lord, how can we know the way?’: The Family in Europe Today,’ attempting to find ways of helping families in Europe navigate towards the fullness of life that we know they will find in Jesus Christ. We are deeply grateful to our hosts, Cardinal Muresan, President of the Bishops Conference of Romania, Archbishop Aurel Percă, and specifically the Carmelite community here at Ciofliceni. We are also honoured to have Professor Gabriella Gambino, Undersecretary at the Dicastery for Laity, Family & Life, come to us from the Holy See and from the side, as it were, of the Holy Father. We are very pleased to welcome the President of the CCEE, Archbishop Gintaras Grušas, supporting us and guiding us as we begin our second quinquennium. I would also like to welcome the Chargé d’Affaires of the Holy See in Romania, Msgr. Germano Penemote, who has graced us with his presence.

The Holy Father, at the World Meeting of Families held in Rome last year, spoke of several ‘steps’ that families ought to take to make that journey closer to the Lord, in whom is their hope and foundation. In speaking of the first step, that being the step towards marriage itself, despite the difficulties and obstacles that the world might put in the way, he says that, ‘by the grace of the sacrament [of marriage], God makes it a wonderful journey, to be undertaken with him and never alone. The family,’ he says, ‘is not a lofty idea unattainable in reality. God solemnly promises his presence in your marriage and family, not only on the day

of your wedding, but for the rest of your lives. And he keeps on supporting you, every day of your lives.’

These days, we hope to add a small of faithful witness to the ways in which God’s presence can be known and felt in the lives of married couples and families. Drawing on the expert knowledge and practical wisdom of academics and pastors, we hope to arrive at a better knowledge of the situation of the family in general in Europe, so that we might better promote the Church’s teaching on marriage and the family while also being better equipped to offer sound pastoral care to families in our own countries.

This conference is a response to the desire of the Holy Father when he said, ‘So let us support the family! Let us defend it from what compromises its beauty. Let us approach this mystery of love with wonder, discretion and tenderness. And let us commit ourselves to safeguarding its precious and delicate bonds: children, parents, grandparents.... We need these bonds to live and to live well, to make humanity more fraternal.’

As we listen to our speakers over these next few days, we hope to gain a deeper understanding of *Catechumenal Itineraries for Married Life* published by the Dicastery for Laity, Family and Life, in order to find new and engaging ways to offer pastoral care to married couples in our own context. In that sense, we are very pleased to have Professor Gambino here with us in person. We hope to benefit from her insights, close to the heart of the Holy Father and the Holy See. We also hope that we might benefit from the academic expertise and pastoral experience of His Eminence Cardinal Eijk as he explores the Church’s teaching on marriage and sexuality. We hope to come to a greater appreciation of the various challenges that families face across Europe and how families might be helped to face these challenges and to overcome them. We hope to take inspiration

and encouragement as we are offered thoughts on how Christians might be formed in the context of family life. And, finally, we hope that through our getting to know each other, by praying together and by enjoying the sharing of each other's experiences, we can take strength from each other as we carry out this mission entrusted to us which, although life-giving, is no longer taken for granted and, in fact, is often fraught with difficulty.

We have already asked for the Holy Spirit to guide our words, thoughts and deliberations in these days. Let us also entrust this conference to Our Lady of Mount Carmel, that through her intercession our work in the field of the pastoral care of married couples and families will bear fruit, so that family life in Europe might be renewed and flourish, all for the good of those families, for the good of all European society and for the glory of God. Thank you for your attention, *Buon lavoro*, and God bless you all!