

Amoris Laetitia Chapter 3

Looking to Jesus: The Vocation of the Family

As a member of two music ministry groups, I am fascinated with the many ways that the themes found in favorite hymns and songs celebrate the 'Word of God.' Whether *Sing to the Mountains*, *Sing a new Song*, or *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, the message of God found in each musical piece touches the heart of the Gospel message we proclaim. Pope Francis opens this chapter by reminding us that the core of the Gospel message, the Kerygma, "is what is most beautiful, most excellent, most appealing and at the same time most necessary." (58). Pope Francis outlines the need for us to enter more deeply into the Word of God "which we must hear again and again in different ways, and which we must always announce in one form or another." (58). Very much like how I hear a similar message via different hymns and songs, I can learn more and interpret nuances differently because of the various styles of music. As for the message our Pontiff states: "nothing is more solid, profound, secure, meaningful and wise than that message." (58). This chapter explores in great detail, through many illustrative scriptural examples, the Church's teachings on marriage and the family.

"Our teaching on marriage and the family cannot fail to be inspired and transformed by this message of love and tenderness; otherwise, it becomes nothing more than the defence of a dry and lifeless doctrine." (59). Echoing the call for a pastoral approach to deepening our understanding of family and marriage encountered in chapter 2, Pope Francis posits that "the Christian family can be fully understood only in the light of the Father's infinite love revealed in Christ, who gave himself up for our sake and who continues to dwell in our midst." (59). Through sharing beautiful examples of Christ's love, mercy, and compassion, the chapter goes into great detail about how marriage and family life is to be viewed as 'a gift' from the Lord.

In reminding us of God's divine covenantal love for all of humanity, our salvation history, we recall that "through his Church, Christ bestows on marriage and the family the grace necessary to bear witness to the love of God and to live the life of communion." (63). In several examples such as: the miracle at Cana, friendship with Lazarus and his family, and sympathizing with grieving parents over the loss of a child, Jesus "demonstrated the true meaning of mercy, which entails the restoration of the covenant." (64). Jesus models 'gratuitous love' in the face of sin and in doing so models how we are called to do the same in our relationships. Pope Francis reinforces this point through recounting the nativity narrative where "the incarnation of the Word in a human family, in Nazareth, by its very newness changed the history of the world." (65). Mary said 'yes' to have the Word conceived in her womb. Joseph too said 'yes' in naming Jesus and watching over mother and son. We witness the struggles and toil of a family, who despite the harshness and challenges life can sometimes bring, such as exile, persecution and humiliation, hold their communion with God with humility and love. "The covenant of love and fidelity lived by the Holy Family of Nazareth illuminates the principle which gives shape to every family...on this basis, every family, despite its weaknesses, can become a light in the darkness of the world."(66.) This is truly a hope-filled message.

From the example of the Holy Family, we next examine several documents of the church, such as Second Vatican Council's Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes*, which promotes the dignity of marriage and family. We learn that in marriage "Christ the Lord makes himself present to the Christian spouses in the

sacrament of marriage and remains with them.” (67). Through the incarnation, Jesus “assumes human love, purifies it and brings it to fulfilment. By his spirit, he gives spouses the capacity to live that love, permeating every part of their lives of faith, hope and charity.” (67). This is central to the foundation of the Christian family.

Pope Francis cites the work of Blessed Paul VI (*Humanae Vitae*) which brings out the “intrinsic bond between conjugal love and the generation of life: married love requires of husband and wife the full awareness of their obligations in the matter of responsible parenthood...“the exercise of responsible parenthood requires that husband and wife, keeping a right order of priorities, recognize their own duties towards God, themselves, their families and human society.” Pope Francis furthers his views through citing Saint John Paul II’s *Familiaris Consortio* which “defined the family as ‘the way of the Church...how spouses, in their mutual love, receive the gift of the Spirit of Christ and live their call to holiness.” (69). This is echoed by excerpts from Pope Benedict XVI’s *Deus Caritas Est*, where he states “marriage based on an exclusive and definitive love becomes an icon of the relationship between God and his people...God’s way of loving becomes the measure of human love.” Further, in *Caritas in Veritate*, Benedict XVI stresses the importance of love in society “as a place where we learn the experience of the common good.” (70). The message is consistent in all cases: love is at the heart of our existence. Marriage and the family are rooted in love; a love that is radiated and witnessed through Jesus.

The chapter progresses to a detailed examination of marriage including the nuptial mystery, sexuality, imperfect situations, the ministry of marriage, procreation, and the sanctity of life. The message of the “Church’s teaching is meant to help couples experience in a complete, harmonious and conscious way their communion as husband and wife.” (82.) The chapter then explores the role of family and the Church. Pope Francis asserts that “the Church is a family of families, constantly enriched by the lives of all those domestic churches...the church is good for the family and the family is good for the Church. The safeguarding of the Lord’s gift in the sacrament of matrimony is concern not only of individual families but of the entire Christian community.” (87.) Pope Francis assures us that “the experience of love in families is a perennial source of strength for the life of the Church.” (88). Examples of the beauty of marriage, the value of family and the profound sense of God’s covenant of love with humanity are abundant in this chapter.

Just as a song sounds better when others join in and lend harmony, Pope Francis’ shared wisdom on marriage and family life in this chapter is succinctly captured in his closing words: “The beauty of this mutual, gratuitous gift, the joy which comes from a life that is born and the loving care of all family members – from toddlers to seniors- are just a few of the fruits which make the response to the vocation of the family unique and irreplaceable, both for the Church and for society as a whole.” (88). What a wonderful song these words would make!

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