

*The Joy of Love, Session 2:*

# The Vocation & Reality of Family Life

*Saint Pius X Catholic Church, 1 September 2021*



This week's readings from Pope Francis' *Amoris Laetitia*:

- Chapter 2, "The Experiences and Challenges of Families" (31-57)
- Chapter 3, "Looking to Jesus: The Vocation of the Family" (58-88)

## Opening Prayer

### Preliminary Discussion

1. Prior to the 2014 and 2015 Synods, there was a broad consultation of the laity regarding challenges and perceptions of marriage and family. What would you most want to share with Pope Francis and the bishops about the realities of family life?

## Part 1: Challenges for Family Life Today

**"The Synod's reflections show us that there is no stereotype of the ideal family, but rather a challenging mosaic made up of many different realities, with all their joys, hopes and problems."**  
(*Amoris Laetitia* 57)

**"At the risk of oversimplifying, we might say that we live in a culture which pressures young people not to start a family"** (*Amoris Laetitia* 40); nowadays, family life **"comes to appear as an old-fashioned and outdated option"** (*Amoris Laetitia* 53). Pope Francis lists several cultural factors that discourage marriage:

- Extreme individualism (33)
- Cult of authenticity and personal autonomy (33, 34); narcissism (39)
- Family seen as inconvenient (34); throwaway culture (39)
- Fear of loneliness / fear of entrapment (34)
- Social media and the "culture of the ephemeral" (39)
- Cohabitation before or instead of marriage (53)

Pope Francis identifies some common challenges that contribute to brokenness experienced within family life:

- Lack of maturity and formation when confronting marital problems (41)
- Increasing frequency of single-parent or non-traditional family structure (45)
- Challenge of raising special needs children (47)
- Perception of the elderly as a burden (48)
- Distractions, stress (50); breakdown in communication (51)
- Drug use, alcoholism, gambling, and other addictions (51)
- Domestic violence (54)
- Absence of father figure (55)

The Church asserts **“how important it is to insist on the rights of the family and not only those of individuals. The family is a good which society cannot do without, and it ought to be protected”** (*Amoris Laetitia* 44). Pope Francis lists many wider societal issues that negatively impact family life:

- Pornography, commercialization of the body, prostitution (41)
- Politics and promotion of abortion and contraception (42)
- Lack of widespread and supportive religious environment (43)
- Lack of affordable housing (44)
- Lack of employment and family-friendly work conditions (44)
- Sexual abuse of children (45)
- Migration, human trafficking (46)
- Poverty (49)
- Euthanasia and assisted suicide (48)
- Inequality between men and women (54)
- Gender ideologies (56)

### Discussion Questions

1. What challenges identified by Pope Francis do you think are most pervasive for families within our own parish community? What reasons for hope do you see among families here at Saint Pius?
2. Pope Francis acknowledges that “families often feel abandoned due to a lack of interest and attention on the part of institutions” (*Amoris Laetitia* 43). What “blind spots” do you perceive here at Saint Pius, and how can our parish community do a better job of supporting families or situations that might be neglected?
3. As we read through chapter 2, it can be easy to feel discouraged. How can you nonetheless see the “joy of love” at work in the concrete experiences of modern families?

## Part 2: A Catholic Vision for Marriage and Family Life

Jesus is at the heart of the Church's understanding of marriage and 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 defense of a dry and lifeless doctrine.”** (*Amoris Laetitia* 59)

As a sacrament, Christian marriage **“is a sign of how much Christ loved his Church in the covenant sealed on the cross, yet it also makes that love present in the communion of the spouses”** (*Amoris Laetitia* 73).

Throughout chapter 3, Pope Francis reminds readers of the key elements of Christian marriage (free, total, faithful, fruitful, indissoluble, etc.) and of the responsibilities of married couples toward one another and their children. Jesus himself understands the realities of married life (*Amoris Laetitia* 64), accompanies couples, and strengthens them in their vocation with grace: **“Both are called to respond to God’s gift with commitment, creativity, perseverance and daily effort. They can always invoke the assistance of the Holy Spirit who consecrated their union, so that his grace may be felt in every new situation that they encounter”** (*Amoris Laetitia* 74).

Families matter to the Church

**“The experience of love in families is a perennial source of strength for the life of the Church.”** (*Amoris Laetitia* 88)

**“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 a concern not only of individual families but of the entire Christian community.”** (*Amoris Laetitia* 87)

### Discussion Questions

1. Which of the Gospel stories of Jesus’ ministry among families (see *Amoris Laetitia* 64 for ideas) most resonates with you? Why?
2. What was the most helpful advice or preparation that you received before your own marriage? What advice would you want to share with engaged couples to help them better understand the nature of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony?
3. “The married couple are therefore a permanent reminder for the Church of what took place on the cross” (*Amoris Laetitia* 72). Give an example of how the Christian witness of a married couple has helped you appreciate this truth or grow in your own faith.

### Part 3: The Church and the Family

Pope Francis acknowledges failures on the part of the Church

**“We also need to be humble and realistic, acknowledging that at times the way we present our Christian beliefs and treat other people has helped contribute to today’s problematic situation. We need a healthy dose of self-criticism.”** (*Amoris Laetitia* 36)

**“At times we have also proposed a far too abstract and almost artificial theological ideal of marriage, far removed from the concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families. This excessive idealization, especially when we have failed to inspire trust in God’s grace, has not helped to make marriage more desirable and attractive, but quite the opposite.”** (*Amoris Laetitia* 36)

How the Church is called to support marriage and family life today

**“We need to find the right language, arguments and forms of witness that can help us reach the hearts of young people, appealing to their capacity for generosity, commitment, love and even heroism, and in this way inviting them to take up the challenge of marriage with enthusiasm and courage.”** (*Amoris Laetitia* 40)

**“Following this divine pedagogy, the Church turns with love to those who participate in her life in an imperfect manner: she seeks the grace of conversion for them; she encourages them to do good, to take loving care of each other and to serve the community in which they live and work.”** (*Amoris Laetitia* 78)

**“Therefore, while clearly stating the Church’s teaching, pastors are to avoid judgments that do not take into account the complexity of various situations, and they are to be attentive, by necessity, to how people experience and endure distress because of their condition.”** (2015 Synod, quoted in *Amoris Laetitia* 79)

**“We also find it hard to make room for the consciences of the faithful, who very often respond as best they can to the Gospel amid their limitations, and are capable of carrying out their own discernment in complex situations. We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them.”** (*Amoris Laetitia* 37)

#### Discussion Questions

1. What might a “more responsible and generous effort to present the reasons and motivations for choosing marriage and the family” (*Amoris Laetitia* 35) look like?
2. In paragraphs 35-38, Pope Francis offers an extended examination of conscience for believers concerning their own witness to the joy of family life. How have you seen these elements at work in your parish or in your own life?
3. Brainstorm some ideas for “new forms of missionary creativity” (*Amoris Laetitia* 57) pertaining to marriage and family that we could implement here at Saint Pius.

### Closing Prayer

Next week’s reading from *Amoris Laetitia*:

- Chapter 4, “Love in Marriage” (89-164)