



The Joy of Love, Session 5:
Challenges in Married Life
Saint Pius X Catholic Church, 22 September 2021

This week's reading from Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*:

- Chapter 6, "Some Pastoral Perspectives" (paragraphs 199 – 258)

Opening Prayer

Introductory Notes

Pope Francis presents a general overview and acknowledges that **"Different communities will have to devise more practical and effective initiatives that respect both the Church's teaching and local problems and needs"** (*Amoris Laetitia* 199).

Overall goal: **"The Church wishes, with humility and compassion, to reach out to families and 'to help each family to discover the best way to overcome any obstacles it encounters'"** (*Amoris Laetitia* 200).

Pastoral care of families is primarily offered at the level of the parish **"which is the family of families"** (*Amoris Laetitia* 202).

Part 1: Accompaniment Before and During Marriage

Training lay and ordained ministers

The pre-synodal consultations made it clear that **"ordained ministers often lack the training needed to deal with the complex problems currently facing families"** (*Amoris Laetitia* 202). Seminarians should be given a more well-rounded pastoral preparation, involving concrete experiences in parish life and contact with families (*Amoris Laetitia* 203). There is also a need for training lay leaders to accompany families and to more fully utilize the expertise and resources of professionals in a variety of disciplines (*Amoris Laetitia* 204).

Preparing engaged couples for marriage

“Learning to love someone does not happen automatically, nor can it be taught in a workshop just prior to the celebration of marriage” (*Amoris Laetitia* 208).

Although **“there are a number of legitimate ways to structure programs of marriage preparation”** (*Amoris Laetitia* 207), Pope Francis highlights some priorities:

- The value of mentoring from experienced couples (*Amoris Laetitia* 208, 223)
- Help the couple recognize eventual problems and risks and to discern if they have a level of mutual commitment that transcends physical desire (*Amoris Laetitia* 209)
- Remember that the wedding ceremony is not the end, but the beginning (*Amoris Laetitia* 211); also, it really is ok to have a simple wedding ceremony and celebration (*Amoris Laetitia* 212).
- The value of taking time to reflect upon the meaning of the wedding ceremony (the prayers, readings, wording of the vows, etc.) (*Amoris Laetitia* 213-216)
- Provide not just an attractive explanation of Church teachings but also resources that the couple can turn to later on when they face difficulties (*Amoris Laetitia* 211)

The first years of married life

Importance of helping couples embrace their marriage as a **“lifelong project,”** to be realistic about the fact that each person is an **“unfinished project,”** and to understand their union as **“a project to be worked on together, with patience, understanding, tolerance and generosity”** (*Amoris Laetitia* 218).

Need to develop the skill of “negotiation” as “an exercise of mutual love” at each stage (*Amoris Laetitia* 220).

Having “unduly high expectations” that, when unmet, lead to the temptation for a quick separation / “the sober realization that married life is a process of growth” (*Amoris Laetitia* 221).

Some practical suggestions: develop a family spirituality, spend quality time together, take advantage of opportunities to celebrate, deepen one’s interior life (*Amoris Laetitia* 223 – 227).

Program ideas for Catholic parishes, schools, and other institutions (*Amoris Laetitia* 229)

Attitudes toward having children

“The pastoral care of newly married couples must also involve encouraging them to be generous in bestowing life” (*Amoris Laetitia* 222).

Pope Francis recognizes that fruitfulness, fertility, and contraception are a touchy subject. He encourages pastoral ministers to help couples form their conscience in a mature way so that they can discern appropriately about having children. While emphasizing the blessing of children, Pope Francis also mentions and encourages NFP (*Amoris Laetitia* 222).

Part 2: Situations of Crisis and Controversy

“Each crisis becomes an apprenticeship in growing closer together or learning a little more about what it means to be married. There is no need for couples to resign themselves to an inevitable downward spiral or a tolerable mediocrity. On the contrary, when marriage is seen as a challenge that involves overcoming obstacles, each crisis becomes an opportunity” (*Amoris Laetitia* 232).

Unfortunately – as Pope Francis admits – the Church has not consistently been a helpful support for couples facing crisis: **“The answers given to the pre-synodal consultation showed that most people in difficult or critical situations do not seek pastoral assistance, since they do not find it sympathetic, realistic or concerned for individual cases”** (*Amoris Laetitia* 233).

The experience of crisis in marriage

“Couples grow apart and lose their ability to communicate. When problems are not dealt with, communication is the first thing to go” (*Amoris Laetitia* 233).

“Communication is an art learned in moments of peace in order to be practiced in moments of difficulty” (*Amoris Laetitia* 233).

Pope Francis lists crises “typical” of the stages of most marriages (*Amoris Laetitia* 235) and acknowledges the other, more personal, crises that couples face (*Amoris Laetitia* 236). These can be exacerbated by woundedness that a spouse bears from their own childhood experiences (*Amoris Laetitia* 239-240).

Accompaniment after breakdown and divorce

“What is urgently needed today is a ministry to care for those whose marital relationship has broken down” (*Amoris Laetitia* 238).

When separation is inevitable or even morally necessary (*Amoris Laetitia* 241); prioritizing the good of the children beyond the breakdown of a marriage (*Amoris Laetitia* 245-246).

“It is important that the divorced who have entered a new union should be made to feel part of the Church” (*Amoris Laetitia* 243).

Need to make the annulment process simpler, more efficient, and less costly (*Amoris Laetitia* 244).

When one spouse is not Catholic

Mixed marriages (one spouse is a non-Catholic Christian) require “particular attention”; the tricky question of Communion (*Amoris Laetitia* 247)

When a marriage involves disparity of cult (one spouse is not baptized), the Catholic spouse will need extra help to face these unique challenges, especially in the raising of children (*Amoris Laetitia* 248).

Same-sex marriage?

“We would like before all else to reaffirm that every person, regardless of sexual orientation, ought to be respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration, while ‘every sign of unjust discrimination’ is to be carefully avoided, particularly any form of aggression and violence” (*Amoris Laetitia* 250).

“There are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God’s plan for marriage and family” (*Amoris Laetitia* 251).

Support for grieving families

“To turn our backs on a grieving family would show a lack of mercy, mean the loss of a pastoral opportunity, and close the door to other efforts at evangelization” (*Amoris Laetitia* 253).

Closing Prayer

Next week’s reading from *Amoris Laetitia*:

- Chapter 8, “Accompanying, Discerning, and Integrating Weakness” (paragraphs 291 – 312)