

Reactions to the Pope's "The Joy of Love"

First Thoughts on 'Amoris Laetitia'

[The following based on a column published 4/14/16 in several Catholic outlets by Auxiliary Bishop Robert Barron.]

Francis Cardinal George advised seminarians not only to preach truth but to accompany those you have instructed, and commit to help them integrate the truths you have shared. In his complex 264-page document, Pope Francis not only wants the truths regarding **marriage, sexuality, and family** to be clearly declared, but also wants the Church's ministers to reach out in mercy and compassion to those who struggle to live out those truths in their lives.

■ **Marriage.** The Pope repeats the Church's teaching that authentic **marriage is between a man and a woman** who have committed themselves to one another in permanent fidelity, expressing their mutual love and openness to children, and abiding together as a sacrament of Christ's love for his Church (52, 71). The teaching of Pope Paul VI in *Humanae Vitae* is emphasized regarding the deep connection between the unitive and procreative dimensions of conjugal love (80). And he approves of the teaching that homosexual relationships cannot be considered even vaguely analogous to what the Church means by marriage (251).

"The indissolubility of marriage—'what God has joined together, let no man put asunder' (Mt. 19:6)—should not be viewed as a 'yoke' imposed on humanity, but as a 'gift' granted to those who are joined in marriage." (62)

Happy Mother's Day from Pope Francis:

"Dear mothers: Thank you! Thank you for what you are in your family and for what you give to the Church and the world."

"Every child growing within the mother's womb is part of the eternal loving plan of God the Father. ... Each child has a place in God's heart. Once conceived, the Creator's eternal dream comes true. We need to see the embryo with the eyes of God, who always looks beyond mere appearances." [The Joy of Love]

■ **Love is Gentle, Love is Kind...** Pope Francis interprets Paul's famous hymn to love (1st Corinth 90-119) by saying that love is not primarily a feeling (94) but a **commitment of the will** to be patient, to bear with one another, to put away envy, and so forth. This portion of "Amoris Laetitia" should be required reading for marriage preparation programs.

■ **But we all fall short ...** The Pope also honestly admits that many fail to integrate all the dimensions of what the Church means by matrimony. But the Church is a "field hospital," designed to care precisely for the wounded (292).

So we should recognize certain positive elements in irregular or imperfect unions. Appealing to these positive marks such as **fidelity, deep love and the presence of children**, the Church should gradually move that couple toward authentic and fully integrated matrimony (295). The Church needs to develop ways of moving people in illicit or sinful relationships to conversion and full communion with the Body of Christ.

■ **Who bears responsibility?** Employing the Church's classical distinction between the objective quality of a moral act and the subjective responsibility that a person bears for committing that act (302), the Pope recognizes that various pressures, difficulties and dilemmas might reduce a couple's culpability in sinning. Could the Church's minister, therefore, not help such people, in the privacy of the rectory or the confessional, to determine their degree of moral responsibility? Without denying any beliefs or truths of the Church, this may be a way to find, perhaps, for someone in great unease, a way forward.

To read the document in its entirety, view the Vatican website: www.vatican.va. Copies may also be purchased online at various Catholic sites.

Editorial: The Joy of the Family

[The following is taken from *Our Sunday Visitor*, 4/24/16]

The number of U.S. couples marrying sacramentally in the Church is down. **Cohabitation** is becoming the norm. Secularization is growing rapidly. The U.S. divorce rate, even among Catholics, hovers around 30%. Children are seen as 'rights' and commodities rather than as God's gifts. Fewer babies are being baptized.

The Pope's new document tries to stop the bleeding. He tackles head-on the fact that the Church is generally viewed as out of step with modern family living. And he urges the Church to descend to the level of a 'field hospital' to meet couples and families, in whatever condition, where they are.

The Pope's views are addressed directly to Catholics, encouraging and inspiring couples and families in the trenches of everyday life. The document is rich in practical advice and conveys a real understanding of humanity in all its successes and failings.

New Generation of Pregnancy apps

- Mama Glow - lifestyle & nutritional coaching
- Maven - connects patients to doctors and specialists
- Baby2Body - tips, recipes, reminders for new moms

[Newark *Star-Ledger*, 5/2/16]

Pregnant Moms Who Exercise Offer Lifelong Benefits to their Offspring

Research on pregnant mice and observational studies of active pregnant women indicate that their offspring are significantly more physically active than those born to mothers who hadn't exercised. [*Washington Post*, 4/21/16]

Abortion Clinic Abuses in NJ

American Women's Services, Toms River, closed in April. It was managed by abortionist Steven Brigham who lost his NJ medical license in 2014 after he & his associate abortionist, Nicole Riley, severely **botched a late-term abortion** on an 18-year-old girl. According to NJ law, medical practitioners without medical licenses are not allowed to own medical facilities, so Brigham is still "managing" his other six NJ abortion clinics.

Pilgrim Medical Center, a Montclair abortion clinic, filed for Chapter 11 Bankruptcy in March. It owes over \$1.2 mill. to creditors including three women who were awarded over \$300,000 each in an employment lawsuit, \$44,500 to the Pilgrim Gynecology Group, a company owned by Pilgrim, and \$11,000 to the property company also owned by Pilgrim. [*LIFENET newsletter*, April 2016]

Fetal Pain Laws: a First Step?

Legislators in several states have been sponsoring bills such as "Protecting Unborn Children" acts and others that deal with the pain felt by developing babies who are subject to lethal abortion procedures. Utah Senator Curtis Bramble pointed out that protection from pain for the unborn is the same protection that our society offers convicted murderers on death row, and to animals euthanized in animal shelters.

But if "it" feels pain, then "it" is alive. The next question must then be: "What is 'it'?" And once that answer has been recognized and acknowledged, we can move on to protecting the most endangered species of all: **developing human beings**. [based on letters to the editor, *Our Sunday Visitor*, 5/8/16]

Abortion Supporters Attack Mrs. Clinton

On NBC's "Meet the Press," Hillary Clinton referred to the "unborn person" as having no constitutional rights. As expected, pro-lifers condemned her. But "she was also attacked by her pro-choice allies for uttering the words 'unborn person.' To say that the fetus is a person if the mother wants it, and it's not if she doesn't, is not science. It's spin." [Will. McGurn, *Wall St Jnl*, 4/26/16]

Healing After Abortion? Yes!

- I was told: "You are putting yourself through your own purgatory." But I could not bring myself to accept forgiveness.
- "Thirteen years later and I still haven't forgiven myself. I live with this shame, guilt and disgust every day of my life."
- "I cannot believe God would forgive the life I have led."
- "I am no longer alone. After 29 years of silence, shame, fear, regret and pain, I reached out."
- "It is a difficult but worthwhile journey. You must face yourself honestly."
- "For so long I defined myself by my abortions. But I learned that I am defined by God's infinite love for me."

The Jubilee Year of Mercy proclaimed by Pope Francis has reinvigorated the pro-life movement's focus on healing for those who have been involved in abortion. The quotes above are but a few of the many thousands sent to the website of Project Rachel, the post-abortion ministry of the Catholic Church (www.HopeAfterAbortion.org). They speak for many who **struggle with forgiveness** after abortion.

Even nonbelievers feel that they did something wrong because God has written natural law on every human heart (cf. Heb 8:10). But when becoming pregnant sets off a "crisis," conscience can easily be drowned out by fears of condemnation, disappointment, losing a boyfriend, raising a child alone, or fear of not being able to complete one's education.

"Let no soul fear to draw near to me, even though its sins be as scarlet." (*Diary of St. Faustina: Divine Mercy in My Soul*, no. 699) Jesus demonstrated God's mercy over and over: the lost sheep parable, the outcast Samaritan woman at Jacob's well who had five husbands and was living with one who is not her husband, the 'sinful' woman who bathes Jesus' feet with her tears. All received Jesus' gentleness, truth and love. And so can any sinner.

"Thanks to Project Rachel I am me again. The retreat allowed me the opportunity to experience God's love and forgiveness—something I had decided I was not worthy of. Little did I know that God was there, all along, offering me his love. ... I am happy again and the people whom I love sense that."

If you know of someone in need of confidential help to experience God's forgiveness and healing, visit the Church website (above) or call 888-456-4673. Other resources include Sisters of Life retreats: call 866-575-0075 or visit hopeandhealing@sistersoflife.org.