



Pastoral for Family

“The Christian proclamation on the Family is good news indeed” AL1

Love Made Fruitful

Amoris Laetitia – Chapter V

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INTRODUCTION

This article will present the main points of the fifth chapter of the apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis, Amoris Laetitia. It proposes a method that will help the readers to decipher the content of the chapter by extracting from it the post-synodal perspective and the challenging realities around the theme of conjugal fruitfulness which is not only limited among immediate family circle but as well as its implication in a wider perspective of family.

Love always gives life. Conjugal love “does not end with the couple... The couple, in giving themselves to one another, give not just themselves but also to the reality of children, who are a living reflection of their love, a permanent sign of their conjugal unity and a living and inseparable synthesis of their being a father and a mother¹ (AL 165).

A. **WELCOMING A NEW LIFE**

This section will deal on love and pregnancy and the love of a mother and a father. “A new baby is like the beginning of all things – wonder, hope, a dream of possibilities.”² (Eda J. LeShan). The presence of a newborn revives our hearts and makes us wonder the giftedness of human life. Let us contemplate the following pictures:



¹ Juan Pablo II, Exhort. ap. Familiaris consortio (22 noviembre 1981), 14: AAS 74 (1982), 96.

² Eda LeShan was an American writer, television host, counselor, educator, and playwright. She was a "voice of respect for the inherent integrity of children".

➤ **The post synodal perspective**

The family is the setting in which a new life is not only born but also welcomed as a gift of God. Each new life “allows us to appreciate the utterly gratuitous dimension of love, which never ceases to amaze us. It is the beauty of being loved first: children are loved even before they arrive”³. Here we see a reflection of the primacy of the love of God, who always takes the initiative, for children “are loved before having done anything to deserve it”⁴ (AL 166).

Love and Pregnancy

Pregnancy is a difficult but wonderful time. A mother joins with God to bring forth the miracle of a new life.” Each woman shares in “the mystery of creation, which is renewed with each birth”⁵...Every child growing within the mother’s womb is part of the eternal loving plan of God the Father: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you” (Jer. 1:5). Each child has a place in God’s heart from all eternity; once he or she is conceived, the Creator’s eternal dream comes true. (AL 168)

The love of a mother and a father

Husband and wife, father and mother, both “cooperate with the love of God the Creator, and are, in a certain sense, his interpreters”⁶. They show their children the maternal and paternal face of the Lord. Together they teach the value of reciprocity, of respect for differences and of being able to give and take (AL 172).

“Mothers are the strongest antidote to the spread of self-centered individualism. It is they who testify to the beauty of life”⁷. Certainly, “a society without mothers would be dehumanized, for mothers are always, even in the worst of times, witnesses to tenderness, dedication and moral strength. Mothers often communicate the deepest meaning of religious practice in the first prayers and acts of devotion that their children learn”⁸ (AL 174).

A mother who watches over her child with tenderness and compassion helps him or her to grow in confidence and to experience that the world is a good and welcoming place. This helps the child to grow in self-esteem and, in turn, to develop a capacity for intimacy and empathy. A father, for his part, helps the child to perceive the limits of life, to be open to the challenges of the wider world, and to see the need for hard work and strenuous effort. A father possessed of a clear and serene masculine identity who demonstrates affection and concern for his wife is just as necessary as a caring mother. There can be a certain flexibility of roles and responsibilities, depending on the concrete circumstances of each particular family. But the clear and well-defined presence of both figures, female and male, creates the environment best suited to the growth of the child (AL 175).

God sets the father in the family so that by the gifts of his masculinity he can be close to his wife and share everything, joy and sorrow, hope and hardship. And to be close to his children as they grow – when they play and when they work, when they are carefree and when they are distressed, when they are talkative and when they are silent, when they are daring and when they are afraid, when they stray and when they get back on the right path. To be a father who is always present (AL 177).

➤ **Challenging realities**

Children, although are gifts and are parts of the eternal loving plan of God, have never been freed from becoming prey of family and social upheavals which threatens their life and growth to maturity even during

³ Catechesis (11 febrero 2015): L’Osservatore Romano, ed. semanal en lengua española, 13 de febrero de 2015, p. 12.

⁴ *Ibíd.*

⁵ Catechesis (12 marzo 1980), 3: L’Osservatore Romano, ed. semanal en lengua española, 16 de marzo de 1980, p.3

⁶ Conferencia de Obispos Católicos de Australia, Carta past. Don’t Mess with Marriage (24 noviembre 2015), 13.

⁷ Catechesis (7 enero 2015): L’Osservatore Romano, ed. semanal en lengua española, 9 de enero de 2015, p. 16.

⁸ *Ibíd.*

the first moments of their lives (cf. AL 167). Among other realities that impedes the welcoming and growing of children in the different dimensions of life we can enumerate some as follows:

1. *The lack of respect of the human embryo and valuing of the gift of human life*

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “each year, almost half of all pregnancies – 121 million – are unintended, and six out of ten unintended pregnancies end in induced abortion”⁹ It has been legalized in almost the countries in the world according to different grounds which include: to save woman’s life, preserve woman’s health, pregnancy due to rape or incest, fetal impairment or simply by request.

The post-synodal exhortation invites us “to think of the great value of that embryo from the moment of conception. We need to see it with the eyes of God, who always looks beyond mere appearances” (AL 168). Only the Father, the Creator, fully knows the child; he alone knows his or her deepest identity and worth. Expectant mothers need to ask God for the wisdom fully to know their children and to accept them as they are. Some parents feel that their child is not coming at the best time. They should ask the Lord to heal and strengthen them to accept their child fully and wholeheartedly; for “children are a gift. Each one is unique and irreplaceable... We love our children because they are children, not because they are beautiful, or because they are in this way or the other; no, it’s because s/he is a child¹⁰” (Cf. AL 170).

2. *The absence of a mother*



The sense of being orphaned that affects many children and young people today is much deeper than we think. Nowadays we acknowledge as legitimate and indeed desirable that women wish to study, work, develop their skills and have personal goals. At the same time, we cannot ignore the need that children have for a mother’s presence, especially in the first months of life. The weakening of this maternal presence with its feminine qualities poses a grave risk to our world (Cf. AL 173). Without mothers, not only would there be no new faithful, but the faith itself would lose a good part of its simple and profound warmth (Cf. AL 174).

3. *The absence of a father*

We often hear that ours is “a society without fathers”. In Western culture, the father figure is said to be symbolically absent, missing or vanished. The problem no longer seems to be the overbearing presence of the father so much as his absence, his not being there. Fathers are often so caught up in themselves and their work, and at times in their own self-fulfillment, that they neglect their families. They leave the little ones and the young to themselves. The presence of the father, and hence his authority, is also impacted by the amount of time given over to the communications and entertainment media. Nowadays authority is often considered suspect and adults treated with impertinence. They themselves become uncertain and so fail to offer sure and solid guidance to their children (Cf. AL 176).

Fathers who are too controlling overshadow their children, they don’t let them develop. Some fathers feel they are useless or unnecessary but in reality, children need to find a father waiting for them when they return home with their problems. It is not good for children to lack a father and to grow up before they are ready (Cf. AL 177).

4. *Unwanted children*

“From the first moments of their lives, many children are rejected, abandoned, and robbed of their childhood and future. There are those who dare to say, as if to justify themselves, that it was a mistake to bring these children into the world. This is shameful! ... How can we issue solemn declarations on human rights and the

⁹ (https://www.who.int/health-topics/abortion#tab=tab_2)

¹⁰ Catequesis (11 febrero 2015): L’Osservatore Romano, ed. semanal en lengua española, 13 de febrero de 2015, p. 12.

rights of children, if we then punish children for the errors of adults?”¹¹ If a child comes into this world in unwanted circumstances, the parents and other members of the family must do everything possible to accept that child as a gift from God and assume the responsibility of accepting him or her with openness and affection. For “when speaking of children who come into the world, no sacrifice made by adults will be considered too costly or too great, if it means the child never has to feel that he or she is a mistake, or worthless or abandoned to the four winds and the arrogance of man”.¹² The gift of a new child, entrusted by the Lord to a father and a mother, begins with acceptance, continues with lifelong protection and has as its final goal the joy of eternal life”¹³ (Cf. AL 166).

5. The loss of mutual love between spouses

Another aspect that hinders the growth of children is the loss of mutual love between the mother and the father. With its absence, a child could become a mere plaything. For a child to develop harmoniously and integrally, he or she must receive love from both parents not as a separate individual love towards the child but as the conjoint love of the spouses perceived by the child as the source of one’s life and the solid foundation of the family (cf. AL 172).

B. AN EXPANDING FRUITFULNESS

This section will deal in wider perspective the theme of fruitfulness, where discerning the body of Christ is the center focus.

➤ **The post synodal perspective**

Marriage was not instituted solely for the procreation of children... Even in cases where, despite the intense desire of the spouses, there are no children, marriage still retains its character of being a whole manner and communion of life, and preserves its value and indissolubility”.¹⁴ So too, “motherhood is not a solely biological reality, but is expressed in diverse ways”¹⁵ (Cf. AL 178).

Adoption is a very generous way to become parents...Adopting a child is an act of love, offering the gift of a family to someone who has none (Cf. AL 179-180).

Procreation and adoption are not the only ways of experiencing the fruitfulness of love. Christian families should never forget that “faith does not remove us from the world, but draws us more deeply into it. Each of us, in fact, has a special role in preparing for the coming of God’s kingdom in our world”¹⁶. Families should not see themselves as a refuge from society, but instead go forth from their homes in a spirit of solidarity with others. In this way, they become a hub for integrating persons into society and a point of contact between the public and private spheres. Married couples should have a clear awareness of their social obligations. With this, their affection does not diminish but is flooded with new light (Cf. AL 181).

God has given the family the job of “domesticating” the world and helping each person to see fellow human beings as brothers and sisters (Cf. AL 183).

Christian marriages thus enliven society by their witness of fraternity, their social concern, their outspokenness on behalf of the underprivileged, their luminous faith and their active hope. Their fruitfulness expands and in countless ways makes God’s love present in the society (Cf. AL 184).

¹¹ Catequesis (8 abril 2015): L’Osservatore Romano, ed. semanal en lengua española, 10 de abril de 2015, p. 16

¹² *Ibíd*

¹³ Cf. Conc. Ecum. Vat II, Const. past. *Gaudium et spes*, sobre la Iglesia en el mundo actual, 51: « Sea claro a todos que la vida de los hombres y la tarea de transmitirla no se limita a este mundo sólo y no se puede medir ni entender sólo por él, sino que mira siempre al destino eterno de los hombres»

¹⁴ Conc. Ecum. Vat. II, Const. past. *Gaudium et spes*, sobre la Iglesia en el mundo actual, 50.

¹⁵ V Conferencia General del Episcopado Latinoamericano y del Caribe, Documento de Aparecida (29 junio 2007), 457.

¹⁶ Discurso en el Encuentro con las Familias en Manila (16 enero 2015): AAS 107 (2015), 178.

Discerning the body

The Eucharist demands that we be members of the one body of the Church. Those who approach the Body and Blood of Christ may not wound that same Body by creating scandalous distinctions and divisions among its members. This is what it means to “discern” the body of the Lord, to acknowledge it with faith and charity both in the sacramental signs and in the community. The celebration of the Eucharist thus becomes a constant summons for everyone “to examine himself or herself” (1 Cor 11:28), to open the doors of the family to greater fellowship with the underprivileged, and in this way to receive the sacrament of that Eucharistic love which makes us one body. We must not forget that “the ‘mysticism’ of the sacrament has a social character”¹⁷. When those who receive it turn a blind eye to the poor and suffering, or consent to various forms of division, contempt and inequality, the Eucharist is received unworthily. On the other hand, families who are properly disposed and receive the Eucharist regularly, reinforce their desire for fraternity, their social consciousness and their commitment to those in need (Cf. AL 186).

➤ **Challenging realities**

1. Adoption and trafficking of children

The inability to bear children is a real cause of suffering for married couples. Adoption and foster care of a child whether due to infertility does not only fulfill the right of married couples to self-fulfillment but also make it visible the essential dimension of what parenting and raising of children means. It awakens the consciousness of people that children, in whatever circumstances they come from, are persons in their own right who need to be accepted, loved and cared for and not just brought into this world but for a purpose we may be unable to recognize. The best interests of the child should always underlie any decision in adoption and foster care. On the other hand, “the trafficking of children between countries and continents needs to be prevented by appropriate legislative action and state control” (Cf. AL 178-180).



2. Overly different or “set apart” families

Some Christian families due to their own beliefs, opinions or simply the way they treat others and their relatives end up being seen as remote and set themselves apart from the community. This, however, does not make the family fruitful. In this case, it should be good to consider the relationship of Jesus with his parents and towards the wider family. Jesus grew in wisdom and age due to his normal interaction with relatives, friends and neighbors. This is also the reason why, it was only after a whole day travel that they become aware that Jesus was not with them. They thought he may be with the group of travelers going back to Nazareth (Cf. AL 182).

3. Degradation of social and political values

Married couples who experience the power of love see beyond their needs and their dreams. They are able to perceive the reign of injustice, oppression, violence in the society and as a consequence, the suffering, the needs of the poor and the underprivileged. But they don't end up seeing. They do something about it. They open their families to those who are in need. They speak in behalf of the unheard, the least. They promote the culture of encounter, solidarity mindful of the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew: Whatsoever you do to the least of my brethren you did it to me. They become beacons of hope. Their life becomes a testimony of the presence of God in our society (Cf. AL 183-184).

¹⁷ Benedicto XVI, Carta enc. *Deus caritas est* (25 dicembre 2005), 14: AAS 98 (2006), 228.

C. LIFE IN THE WIDER FAMILY

➤ Post synodal perspective

The nuclear family needs to interact with the wider family made up of parents, aunts and uncles, cousins and even neighbors. This greater family may have members who require assistance, or at least companionship and affection, or consolation amid suffering (Cf. AL 187).

This section deals on the implications of life in the wider family like becoming sons and daughters in a new way, the relationship with the elderly, being brothers and having a big heart.

Being sons

When we talk about the life in a wider family, first and foremost, we need to think first of our parents. In the teaching of Jesus before the Pharisees, he stressed out that it is contrary to God's law to abandon one's parents. (cf. Mk 7:8-13). It is only right for us to keep in mind that each of us is a son or a daughter. "Even if one becomes an adult, or an elderly person, even if one becomes a parent, if one occupies a position of responsibility, underneath all of this is still the identity of a child. We are all sons and daughters. And this always brings us back to the fact that we did not give ourselves life but that we received it. The great gift of life is the first gift that we received"¹⁸ (Cf. AL 188).

Thus the commandment to honor their father and mother (cf. Ex. 20:12) follows immediately after those that deal with God himself. We can therefore conclude that honoring father and mother has to do with something sacred, something divine, and something at the basis of every other kind of human respect (Cf. AL 189).

In the context of marriage, however, to leave the parents is being demanded as a necessary sacrifice and surrender so that "a new home be a true hearth, a place of security, hope and future plans and the couple can truly become "one flesh". Here, abandonment or ignoring of parents is never upheld (Cf. AL 190).



The elderly

Saint John Paul II asked us to be attentive to the role of the elderly in our families. The elderly help us to appreciate "the continuity of the generations", by their "charism of bridging the gap". Very often it is grandparents who ensure that the most important values are passed down to their grandchildren: their words, their affection or simply their presence help children to realize that history did not begin with them, that they are now part of an age old pilgrimage and that they need to respect all that came before them (Cf. AL 192).

Being brothers

Relationships between brothers deepen with the passing of time, and "the bond of fraternity that forms in the family between children, if consolidated by an educational atmosphere of openness to others, is a great school of freedom and peace. In the family, human coexistence is learned among brothers and sisters. The family itself introduces fraternity into the world. From this initial experience of fraternity, nourished by affection and education at home, the style of fraternity radiates like a promise upon the whole of society" (Cf. AL 194).

Growing up with brothers makes for a beautiful experience of caring for and helping one another. For "fraternity in families is especially radiant when we see the care, the patience, the affection that surround

¹⁸ Catechesis (18 marzo 2015): L'Osservatore Romano, ed. semanal en lengua española, 20 de marzo de 2015, p. 12.

the little brother or sister who is frail, sick or disabled”¹⁹. It must be acknowledged that “having a brother or a sister who loves you is a profound, precious and unique experience”²⁰ (Cf. AL 195).

A big heart

In addition to the small circle of the couple and their children, there is the larger family, which cannot be overlooked. Indeed, “the love between husband and wife and, in a derivative and broader way, the love between members of the same family – between parents and children, brothers and sisters and relatives and members of the household – is given life and sustenance by an unceasing inner dynamism leading the family to ever deeper and more intense communion, which is the foundation and soul of the community of marriage and the family”²¹. Friends and other families are part of this larger family, as well as communities of families who support one another in their difficulties, their social commitments and their faith (Cf. AL 196).

➤ **Challenging realities**

1. To take care of the relationship with the parents and, at the same time of the conjugal relationship

On the other hand, we oftentimes hear interference of parents to their married children. In some cases, children have not cut their “umbilical connection” with parents. In this case, a spouse tends to disclose secrets to parents than his or her behalf. In addition, the advices, feelings and opinions of parents become more valuable and important than the spouse. This situation cannot go on for long, and even if it takes time, both spouses need to make the effort to grow in trust and communication. Honoring and caring of parents should not go in contradiction with the privacy that couples need to have where trust and communication can foster. Married couples should respond to the challenge of finding new ways of becoming sons (Cf. AL 190).

Moreover, one particularly delicate aspect of love is learning not to view relatives of the spouse as somehow competitors, threats or intruders. The conjugal union demands respect for their traditions and customs, an effort to understand their language and to refrain from criticism, caring for them and cherishing them while maintaining the legitimate privacy and independence of the couple. Being willing to do so is also an exquisite expression of generous love for one’s spouse (Cf. AL 198).

2. Disrespect and abandonment of the elderly

Old age care requires a culture of patient and understanding. In our society that prefers fast, easy, usefulness the elderly encounter themselves “pleading not to be forsaken since their strength is already spent”. This cry of the elderly embodies a task to families and communities for “the Church cannot and does not want to conform to a mentality of impatience, and much less of indifference and contempt, towards old age”²² (Cf. AL 191).

Further, a mentality that can only say, “then is then, now is now” is a serious shortcoming in our society; it is an immature mentality. When grandparents, living memories of the families are no longer valued, the family weakens since they separated from its roots which lead to becoming culturally orphans, uprooted. In addition, the elderly, in most testimonies, are the transmitters of the faith to the young generation. Neglect and abandonment of them leads the family devoid of its past, its origin that holds, nurtures it and of its vision which directs its future. It is therefore a challenge to awaken the families as places where children can sink roots in the rich soil of collective history where a collective sense of gratitude, of appreciation of hospitality which makes the elderly feel like a living part of the community. Hence, they must be seen as men and women, fathers and mothers, who came before us on our own road, in our own house, in our daily battle for a worthy life. The Church should challenge the throw-away culture, prevalent and promoted in our contemporary society, by the overflowing joy of a new embrace between young and old (Cf. AL 191-193).

¹⁹ Catequesis (18 febrero 2015): L’Osservatore Romano, ed. semanal en lengua española, 20 de febrero de 2015, p. 2.

²⁰ *Ibíd*

²¹ Juan Pablo II, Exhort. ap. Familiaris consortio (22 noviembre 1981), 18: AAS 74 (1982), 101.

²² Catequesis (4 marzo 2015): L’Osservatore Romano, ed. semanal en lengua española, 6 de marzo de 2015, p. 12

3. The lack of experience of “fraternity” in the family

Children do need to be patiently taught to treat one another as brothers. This training, at times quite demanding, is a true school of socialization. In some countries, where it has become quite common to have only one child, the experience of being a brother or sister is less and less common. When it has been possible to have only one child, ways have to be found to ensure that he or she does not grow up alone or isolated (Cf. AL 195).

4. Individualistic and isolated mentalities of families

The pervasiveness of individualism in our society today “can lead to creating small nests of security, where others are perceived as bothersome or a threat. Such isolation, however, cannot offer greater peace or happiness; rather, it straitens the heart of a family and makes its life all the more narrow” (Cf. AL 187).

Nuclear families, to become a fruitful basic unit of society, needs to establish relationship with the larger family consisting of the extended family members and neighbors. They are called to make solidary efforts in favor of those in special moments and difficulties in the community such as providing love and support to teenage mothers, abandoned or orphaned children, single parents, persons with disabilities, young people struggling with addiction, unmarried, separated or widowed left alone and the elderly and infirm who lack the support of their children. Consequently, this wider family can help make up for short comings of parents and contribute to providing wholesome love and family stability in case of parent’s incapability (Cf. AL 197).

FOR GROUP DISCUSSION:

1. What has caught your attention in this V chapter of Amoris Laetitia?
2. Of the different challenging realities presented, which of them have you found more prevalent in your surroundings?
3. How do can you personally or as a community respond the challenging realities basing from the perspective of the post synodal exhortation?

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