

## *The Joy of Love*

### ***Chapter Three: “Looking to Jesus: The Vocation of the Family”***

In the third chapter of his exhortation on Marriage and the Family, *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis summarizes the Church’s teaching on marriage and the family. The chapter deals with six topics: (1) Jesus’ teaching on marriage, (2) the Church’s teaching on marriage, (3) the sacramentality of marriage, (4) the imperfect situations in which some people find themselves, (5) the transmission of life and the raising of children, and (6) the relationship between the family and the Church.

Regarding the first topic, the Pope writes, “Jesus, who reconciled all things in himself, restored marriage and the family to their original unity. Marriage and the family have been redeemed by Christ and restored in the image of the Holy Trinity, the mystery from which all true love flows.” In redeeming humanity from sin, therefore, Christ restored marriage and family life to the meaning that God originally intended so that the love between spouses and within the family should bear witness to God’s own love. In Christ, marriage and the family have been raised to a new dignity.

In dealing with the second topic, Pope Francis summarizes the teaching of the Church on marriage and the family. For example, the Second Vatican Council defined marriage as “a community of life and love.” The Council affirms that “true love between husband and wife involves mutual self-giving, includes and integrates the sexual and affective dimensions, in a accordance with God’s plan.” Pope Paul VI highlighted the intrinsic bond between conjugal love and the generation of life. Pope John Paul II defined marriage as “the way of the Church.” Finally, Pope Benedict XVI wrote that marriage is “an icon of the relationship between God and his people.”

When he comes to the third topic, the Pope explains the sacramentality of marriage. He notes that “the family is the image of God, who is a communion of persons.” In marriage and the family we see a reflection of the love between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The sacrament of marriage, the Pope writes is, “a gift given for the sanctification and salvation of the spouses.” Marriage is “a vocation, inasmuch as it is a response to a specific call to experience conjugal love as an imperfect sign of the love between God and the Church.” Spouses who live out the sacrament of marriage faithfully proclaim the gospel to the world by the love they manifest for each other and for their children. The Pope writes that “sexual union, lovingly experienced and sanctified by the sacrament, is in turn a path of growth in the life of grace for the couple. It is a nuptial mystery.”

In writing about the fourth topic, the Pope broaches a delicate question that he will deal with at greater length later: the irregular situations in which some couples find themselves today, for example, the situation of people who are living together without the benefit of marriage. The Pope notes that such situations can become an opportunity to lead couples to celebrate the sacrament of marriage. Therefore, he cautions pastors that, while it is important to state clearly the teaching of the church, they should avoid judgments that “do not take into account the complexity of various situations.”

In the fifth point, the Pope discusses the transmission of life and the rearing of children. He notes that while marriage is firstly “an intimate partnership of love, which is a good for the spouses themselves,” the conjugal union of the spouses is ordered to procreation. The family should be “a sanctuary of life, the place where life is conceived and cared for.”

In his last point, the Pope speaks of the family and the Church. Recalling the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, he writes that the family is “a domestic church,” and the Church itself is a family of families. Thus the Church is good for the family, and the family is good for the Church. To summarize, the sacrament of marriage is an exalted vocation by which spouses are sanctified, the church enriched, and the gospel proclaimed to the world. *Father Matera*