

The Joy of Love

Chapter Five: “Love Made Fruitful”

The fifth chapter of Pope Francis’ exhortation on Marriage and the Family begins in this way: “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 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 being a father and a mother.” In this chapter, the Pope addresses three aspects of love, which is made fruitful through the gift of children: (1) Welcoming New Life, (2) An Expanding Fruitfulness, (3) Life in the Wider Family.

First, the Pope notes that “the family is the setting in which a new life is not only born but welcomed as a gift of God.” The birth of every child, even if unexpected, is to be seen as gift of God. Thus when a child comes into the world in unwanted circumstances, “the parents and other members of the family must do everything possible to accept the child as a gift from God and assume the responsibility of accepting him or her with openness and affection.” The exhortation goes on to describe the exalted vocation of motherhood and fatherhood. It notes that every mother shares in “the mystery of creation, which is renewed with each birth.” It says that “mothers are the strongest antidote to the spread of self-centered individualism.” In describing fatherhood, the Pope exhorts fathers to be present to their children without being controlling so that their children can develop properly.

Second, in his discussion of an expanding fruitfulness, the Pope describes adoption “as a very generous way to become parents. He notes that adopting a child is an act of love that offers the gift of family to someone who does not have a family. Given the need for families to expand in love, the Pope writes: “Families should not see themselves as a refuge from society, but instead go forth from their homes in a spirit of solidarity with others.” Thus, no family can be fruitful if it is “overly set apart.” Jesus himself grew up and interacted with others in a family wider than the family of Mary and Joseph. When we turn “a blind eye to the poor and suffering, or consent to various forms of division, contempt and inequality, the Eucharist is received unworthily.”

Third, the exhortation discusses life in the wider family. Here he notes that “the nuclear family needs to interact with the wider family made up of parents, aunts and uncles, cousins and even neighbors.” Since we are all sons and daughters, even when we are parents, we need to respect our parents at every stage of life, and learn from the years of wisdom that they have accumulated. “A family that fails to respect and cherish its grandparents, who are its living memory, is already in decline, whereas a family that remembers has a future.”

Father Matera

Join Deacon Art and Father Matera

Monday, May 23

as they discuss the Pope's Exhortation,

The Joy of Love,

Parish Center, 7:00 PM