

AMORIS LAETITIA



Amoris Laetitia Family
Year 2021 - 2022

REFLECTION QUESTIONS CHAPTER 5

- 1. What is most meaningful and challenging for you in this chapter?**
- 2. What do you think a parish community can do to help families be "life-giving"?**
- 3. Pope Francis invites couples to reflect on their call to give expression to their conjugal love through generativity as parents, as persons who together work for justice as sons, daughters, brothers and sisters. How do children challenge the love of a married couple? How do they enrich it?**

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Office for Family and Life
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

CHAPTER FIVE

LOVE MADE FRUITFUL

165. 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 their being a father and a mother”.¹⁷⁶

WELCOMING A NEW LIFE

166. 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”.¹⁷⁷ 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”.¹⁷⁸ And yet, “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

¹⁷⁶ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), 14: AAS 74 (1982), 96.

¹⁷⁷ Catechesis (11 February 2015): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 12 February 2015, p. 8.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

rights of children, if we then punish children for the errors of adults?”¹⁷⁹ 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”.¹⁸⁰ 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. By serenely contemplating the ultimate fulfilment of each human person, parents will be even more aware of the precious gift entrusted to them. For God allows parents to choose the name by which he himself will call their child for all eternity.¹⁸¹

167. Large families are a joy for the Church. They are an expression of the fruitfulness of love. At the same time, Saint John Paul II rightly explained that responsible parenthood does not mean “unlimited procreation or lack of awareness of what is involved in rearing children, but rather the empowerment of couples to use their inviolable liberty wisely and responsibly,

¹⁷⁹ Catechesis (8 April 2015): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 9 April 2015, p. 8.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Cf. SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 51: “Let us all be convinced that human life and its transmission are realities whose meaning is not limited by the horizons of this life only: their true evaluation and full meaning can only be understood in reference to our eternal destiny”.

taking into account social and demographic realities, as well as their own situation and legitimate desires”.¹⁸²

Love and pregnancy

168. Pregnancy is a difficult but wonderful time. A mother joins with God to bring forth the miracle of a new life. Motherhood is the fruit of a “particular creative potential of the female body, directed to the conception and birth of a new human being”.¹⁸³ Each woman shares in “the mystery of creation, which is renewed with each birth”.¹⁸⁴ The Psalmist says: “You knit me together in my mother’s womb” (*Ps* 139:13). 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. Let us pause 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.

169. A pregnant woman can participate in God’s plan by dreaming of her child. “For nine months every mother and father dreams about their child... You can’t have a family

¹⁸² *Letter to the Secretary General of the United Nations Organization on Population and Development* (18 March 1994): *Insegnamenti* XVII/1 (1994), 750-751.

¹⁸³ JOHN PAUL II, *Catechesis* (12 March 1980), 3: *Insegnamenti* III/1 (1980), 543.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

without dreams. Once a family loses the ability to dream, children do not grow, love does not grow, life shrivels up and dies”.¹⁸⁵ For Christian married couples, baptism necessarily appears as a part of that dream. With their prayers, parents prepare for baptism, entrusting their baby to Jesus even before he or she is born.

170. Scientific advances today allow us to know beforehand what colour a child’s hair will be or what illnesses they may one day suffer, because all the somatic traits of the person are written in his or her genetic code already in the embryonic stage. Yet 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 to know their children fully 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. It is important for that child to feel wanted. He or she is not an accessory or a solution to some personal need. A child is a human being of immense worth and may never be used for one’s own benefit. So it matters little whether this new life is convenient for you, whether it has features that please you, or whether it fits into your plans and aspirations. 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 look or think as we do, or embody our dreams. We love them because they

¹⁸⁵ *Address at the Meeting with Families in Manila* (16 January 2015): AAS 107 (2015), 176.

are children. A child is a child”.¹⁸⁶ The love of parents is the means by which God our Father shows his own love. He awaits the birth of each child, accepts that child unconditionally, and welcomes him or her freely.

171. With great affection I urge all future mothers: keep happy and let nothing rob you of the interior joy of motherhood. Your child deserves your happiness. Don't let fears, worries, other people's comments or problems lessen your joy at being God's means of bringing a new life to the world. Prepare yourself for the birth of your child, but without obsessing, and join in Mary's song of joy: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord and my spirit exults in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant" (*Lk* 1:46-48). Try to experience this serene excitement amid all your many concerns, and ask the Lord to preserve your joy, so that you can pass it on to your child.

The love of a mother and a father

172. "Children, once born, begin to receive, along with nourishment and care, the spiritual gift of knowing with certainty that they are loved. This love is shown to them through the gift of their personal name, the sharing of language, looks of love and the brightness of a smile. In this way, they learn that the beauty of human relationships touches our soul, seeks our freedom, accepts the difference of others, recognizes and respects them as a partner in dialogue... Such

¹⁸⁶ Catechesis (11 February 2015): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 12 February 2015, p. 8.

is love, and it contains a spark of God's love!"¹⁸⁷ Every child has a right to receive love from a mother and a father; both are necessary for a child's integral and harmonious development. As the Australian Bishops have observed, each of the spouses "contributes in a distinct way to the upbringing of a child. Respecting a child's dignity means affirming his or her need and natural right to have a mother and a father".¹⁸⁸ We are speaking not simply of the love of father and mother as individuals, but also of their mutual love, perceived as the source of one's life and the solid foundation of the family. Without this, a child could become a mere plaything. Husband and wife, father and mother, both "cooperate with the love of God the Creator, and are, in a certain sense, his interpreters".¹⁸⁹ 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. If for some inevitable reason one parent should be lacking, it is important to compensate for this loss, for the sake of the child's healthy growth to maturity.

173. 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

¹⁸⁷ Catechesis (14 October 2015): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 15 October 2015, p. 8.

¹⁸⁸ AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE, Pastoral Letter *Don't Mess with Marriage* (24 November 2015), 13.

¹⁸⁹ SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 50.

that children have for a mother's presence, especially in the first months of life. Indeed, "the woman stands before the man as a mother, the subject of the new human life that is conceived and develops in her, and from her is born into the world".¹⁹⁰ The weakening of this maternal presence with its feminine qualities poses a grave risk to our world. I certainly value feminism, but one that does not demand uniformity or negate motherhood. For the grandeur of women includes all the rights derived from their inalienable human dignity but also from their feminine genius, which is essential to society. Their specifically feminine abilities – motherhood in particular – also grant duties, because womanhood also entails a specific mission in this world, a mission that society needs to protect and preserve for the good of all.¹⁹¹

174. "Mothers are the strongest antidote to the spread of self-centred individualism... It is they who testify to the beauty of life".¹⁹² 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... 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... Dear mothers: thank you!

¹⁹⁰ JOHN PAUL II, Catechesis (12 March 1980), 2: *Insegnamenti* III/1 (1980), 542.

¹⁹¹ Cf. ID., Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (15 August 1988), 30-31: AAS 80 (1988), 1726-1729.

¹⁹² Catechesis (7 January 2015): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 7-8 January 2015, p. 8.

Thank you for what you are in your family and for what you give to the Church and the world”.¹⁹³

175. 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.

176. 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. Manhood itself seems to be called into question. The result has been an understandable confusion. “At first, this was perceived as a liberation: liberation from the father as master, from the father as the representative of a law imposed from without, from the father as the arbiter of his children’s happiness and an obstacle to the emancipation and autonomy of young people. In some homes authoritarianism

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

once reigned and, at times, even oppression”.¹⁹⁴ Yet, “as often happens, one goes from one extreme to the other. In our day, 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-fulfilment, that they neglect their families. They leave the little ones and the young to themselves”.¹⁹⁵ 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. A reversal of the roles of parents and children is unhealthy, since it hinders the proper process of development that children need to experience, and it denies them the love and guidance needed to mature.¹⁹⁶

177. 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

¹⁹⁴ Catechesis (28 January 2015): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 29 January 2015, p. 8.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁶ Cf. *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 28.

present. When I say ‘present’, I do not mean ‘controlling’. Fathers who are too controlling overshadow their children, they don’t let them develop”.¹⁹⁷ Some fathers feel they are useless or unnecessary, but the fact is that “children need to find a father waiting for them when they return home with their problems. They may try hard not to admit it, not to show it, but they need it”.¹⁹⁸ It is not good for children to lack a father and to grow up before they are ready.

AN EXPANDING FRUITFULNESS

178. Some couples are unable to have children. We know that this can be a cause of real suffering for them. At the same time, we know that “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”.¹⁹⁹ So too, “motherhood is not a solely biological reality, but is expressed in diverse ways”.²⁰⁰

179. Adoption is a very generous way to become parents. I encourage those who cannot have children to expand their marital love to embrace those who lack a proper family

¹⁹⁷ Catechesis (4 February 2015), *L’Osservatore Romano*, 5 February 2015, p. 8.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 50.

²⁰⁰ FIFTH GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN BISHOPS, *Aparecida Document* (29 June 2007), No. 457.

situation. They will never regret having been generous. Adopting a child is an act of love, offering the gift of a family to someone who has none. It is important to insist that legislation help facilitate the adoption process, above all in the case of unwanted children, in order to prevent their abortion or abandonment. Those who accept the challenge of adopting and accepting someone unconditionally and gratuitously become channels of God's love. For he says, "Even if your mother forgets you, I will not forget you" (Is 49:15).

180. "The choice of adoption and foster care expresses a particular kind of fruitfulness in the marriage experience, and not only in cases of infertility. In the light of those situations where a child is desired at any cost, as a right for one's self-fulfilment, adoption and foster care, correctly understood, manifest an important aspect of parenting and the raising of children. They make people aware that children, whether natural, adoptive or taken in foster care, are persons in their own right who need to be accepted, loved and cared for, and not just brought into this world. The best interests of the child should always underlie any decision in adoption and foster care".²⁰¹ On the other hand, "the trafficking of children between countries and continents needs to be prevented by appropriate legislative action and state control".²⁰²

181. We also do well to remember that procreation and adoption are not the only ways of experiencing the fruitfulness of love. Even large families are called to make their mark on

²⁰¹ *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 65.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

society, finding other expressions of fruitfulness that in some way prolong the love that sustains them. 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”.²⁰³ 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. As the poet says:

*Your hands are my caress,
The harmony that fills my days.
I love you because your hands
Work for justice.*

*If I love you, it is because you are
My love, my companion and my all,
And on the street, side by side,
We are much more than just two.*²⁰⁴

²⁰³ *Address at the Meeting with Families in Manila* (16 January 2015): AAS 107 (2015), 178.

²⁰⁴ Mario Benedetti, “Te Quiero”, in *Poemas de otros*, Buenos Aires 1993, 316: “*Tus manos son mi caricia / mis acordes cotidianos / te quiero porque tus manos / trabajan por la justicia. // Si te quiero es porque sos / mi amor mi cómplice y todo / y en la calle codo a codo / somos mucho más que dos*”.

182. No family can be fruitful if it sees itself as overly different or “set apart”. To avoid this risk, we should remember that Jesus’ own family, so full of grace and wisdom, did not appear unusual or different from others. That is why people found it hard to acknowledge Jesus’ wisdom: “Where did this man get all this? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?” (*Mk* 6:2-3). “Is this not the carpenter’s son?” (*Mt* 13:55). These questions make it clear that theirs was an ordinary family, close to others, a normal part of the community. Jesus did not grow up in a narrow and stifling relationship with Mary and Joseph, but readily interacted with the wider family, the relatives of his parents and their friends. This explains how, on returning from Jerusalem, Mary and Joseph could imagine for a whole day that the twelve-year-old Jesus was somewhere in the caravan, listening to people’s stories and sharing their concerns: “Supposing him to be in the group of travellers, they went a day’s journey” (*Lk* 2:44). Still, some Christian families, whether because of the language they use, the way they act or treat others, or their constant harping on the same two or three issues, end up being seen as remote and not really a part of the community. Even their relatives feel looked down upon or judged by them.

183. A married couple who experience the power of love know that this love is called to bind the wounds of the outcast, to foster a culture of encounter and to fight for justice. God has given the family the job of “domesticating” the world²⁰⁵ and helping each person to see fellow human beings as

²⁰⁵ Cf. Catechesis (16 September 2015): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 17 September 2015, p. 8.

brothers and sisters. “An attentive look at the everyday life of today’s men and women immediately shows the omnipresent need for a healthy injection of family spirit... Not only is the organization of ordinary life increasingly thwarted by a bureaucracy completely removed from fundamental human bonds, but even social and political mores show signs of degradation”.²⁰⁶ For their part, open and caring families find a place for the poor and build friendships with those less fortunate than themselves. In their efforts to live according to the Gospel, they are mindful of Jesus’ words: “As you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me (*Mt* 25:40)”. In a very real way, their lives express what is asked of us all: “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or rich neighbours, lest they also invite you in return, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed” (*Lk* 14:12-14). You will be blessed! Here is the secret to a happy family.

184. By their witness as well as their words, families speak to others of Jesus. They pass on the faith, they arouse a desire for God and they reflect the beauty of the Gospel and its way of life. 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 society.

²⁰⁶ Catechesis (7 October 2015): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 9 October 2015, p. 8.

Discerning the body

185. Along these same lines, we do well to take seriously a biblical text usually interpreted outside of its context or in a generic sense, with the risk of overlooking its immediate and direct meaning, which is markedly social. I am speaking of *1 Cor* 11:17-34, where Saint Paul faces a shameful situation in the community. The wealthier members tended to discriminate against the poorer ones, and this carried over even to the *agape* meal that accompanied the celebration of the Eucharist. While the rich enjoyed their food, the poor looked on and went hungry: “One is hungry and another is drunk. Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the Church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?” (vv. 21-22).

186. 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; those who fail to do so eat and drink judgment against themselves (cf. v. 29). The celebration of the Eucharist thus becomes a constant summons for everyone “to examine himself or herself” (v. 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”.²⁰⁷ 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.

LIFE IN THE WIDER FAMILY

187. The nuclear family needs to interact with the wider family made up of parents, aunts and uncles, cousins and even neighbours. This greater family may have members who require assistance, or at least companionship and affection, or consolation amid suffering.²⁰⁸ The individualism so prevalent 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.

Being sons and daughters

188. First, let us think of our parents. Jesus told the Pharisees that abandoning one’s parents is contrary to God’s law (cf. *Mk* 7:8-13). We do well to remember that each of us is a son or daughter. “Even if one becomes an adult, or an

²⁰⁷ BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December 2005), 14: AAS 98 (2006), 228.

²⁰⁸ Cf. *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 11.

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”.²⁰⁹

189. Hence, “the fourth commandment asks children... to honour their father and mother (cf. *Ex* 20:12). This commandment comes immediately after those dealing with God himself. Indeed, it has to do with something sacred, something divine, something at the basis of every other kind of human respect. The biblical formulation of the fourth commandment goes on to say: ‘that your days may be long in the land which the Lord your God gives you’. The virtuous bond between generations is the guarantee of the future, and is the guarantee of a truly humane society. A society with children who do not honour parents is a society without honour... It is a society destined to be filled with surly and greedy young people”.²¹⁰

190. There is, however, another side to the coin. As the word of God tells us, “a man leaves his father and his mother” (*Gen* 2:24). This does not always happen, and a marriage is hampered by the failure to make this necessary sacrifice and surrender. Parents must not be abandoned or ignored, but

²⁰⁹ Catechesis (18 March 2015): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 19 March 2015, p. 8.

²¹⁰ Catechesis (11 February 2015): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 12 February 2015, p. 8.

marriage itself demands that they be “left”, so that the new home will be a true hearth, a place of security, hope and future plans, and the couple can truly become “one flesh” (*ibid.*). In some marriages, one spouse keeps secrets from the other, confiding them instead to his or her parents. As a result, the opinions of their parents become more important than the feelings and opinions of their 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. Marriage challenges husbands and wives to find new ways of being sons and daughters.

The elderly

191. “Do not cast me off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength is spent” (*Ps* 71:9). This is the plea of the elderly, who fear being forgotten and rejected. Just as God asks us to be his means of hearing the cry of the poor, so too he wants us to hear the cry of the elderly.²¹¹ This represents a challenge to families and communities, since “the Church cannot and does not want to conform to a mentality of impatience, and much less of indifference and contempt, towards old age. We must reawaken the collective sense of gratitude, of appreciation, of hospitality, which makes the elderly feel like a living part of the community. Our elderly are 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”.²¹² Indeed, “how I would like a Church that

²¹¹ Cf. *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 17-18.

²¹² Catechesis (4 March 2015): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 5 March 2015, p. 8.

challenges the throw-away culture by the overflowing joy of a new embrace between young and old!”²¹³

192. Saint John Paul II asked us to be attentive to the role of the elderly in our families, because there are cultures which, “especially in the wake of disordered industrial and urban development, have both in the past and in the present set the elderly aside in unacceptable ways”.²¹⁴ The elderly help us to appreciate “the continuity of the generations”, by their “charism of bridging the gap”.²¹⁵ Very often it is grandparents who ensure that the most important values are passed down to their grandchildren, and “many people can testify that they owe their initiation into the Christian life to their grandparents”.²¹⁶ 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. Those who would break all ties with the past will surely find it difficult to build stable relationships and to realize that reality is bigger than they are. “Attention to the elderly makes the difference in a society. Does a society show concern for the elderly? Does it make room for the elderly? Such a society will move forward if it respects the wisdom of the elderly”.²¹⁷

²¹³ Catechesis (11 March 2015): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 12 March 2015, p. 8.

²¹⁴ Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, 27 (22 November 1981): AAS 74 (1982), 113.

²¹⁵ Id., *Address to Participants in the “International Forum on Active Aging”* (5 September 1980), 5: *Insegnamenti* III/2 (1980), 539.

²¹⁶ *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 18.

²¹⁷ Catechesis (4 March 2015): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 5 March 2015, p. 8.

193. The lack of historical memory is a serious shortcoming in our society. A mentality that can only say, “Then was then, now is now” is ultimately immature. Knowing and judging past events is the only way to build a meaningful future. Memory is necessary for growth: “Recall the former days” (*Heb 10:32*). Listening to the elderly tell their stories is good for children and young people; it makes them feel connected to the living history of their families, their neighbourhoods and their country. 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. “A society that has no room for the elderly or discards them because they create problems, has a deadly virus”;²¹⁸ “it is torn from its roots”.²¹⁹ Our contemporary experience of being orphans as a result of cultural discontinuity, uprootedness and the collapse of the certainties that shape our lives challenges us to make our families places where children can sink roots in the rich soil of a collective history.

Being brothers and sisters

194. Relationships between brothers and sisters 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, we learn how to live as one. Perhaps we do not always think about this, but

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ *Address at the Meeting with the Elderly* (28 September 2014): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 29-30 September 2014, p. 7.

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”.²²⁰

195. Growing up with brothers and sisters 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 the little brother or sister who is frail, sick or disabled”.²²¹ It must be acknowledged that “having a brother or a sister who loves you is a profound, precious and unique experience”.²²² Children do need to be patiently taught to treat one another as brothers and sisters. 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.

A big heart

196. 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

²²⁰ Catechesis (18 February 2015): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 19 February 2015, p. 8.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² *Ibid.*

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”.²²³ 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.

197. This larger family should provide love and support to teenage mothers, children without parents, single mothers left to raise children, persons with disabilities needing particular affection and closeness, young people struggling with addiction, the unmarried, separated or widowed who are alone, and the elderly and infirm who lack the support of their children. It should also embrace “even those who have made shipwreck of their lives”.²²⁴ This wider family can help make up for the shortcomings of parents, detect and report possible situations in which children suffer violence and even abuse, and provide wholesome love and family stability in cases when parents prove incapable of this.

198. Finally, we cannot forget that this larger family includes fathers-in-law, mothers-in-law and all the relatives of the couple. One particularly delicate aspect of love is learning not to view these relatives as somehow competitors,

²²³ JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), 18: AAS 74 (1982), 101.

²²⁴ Catechesis (7 October 2015): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 8 October 2015), p. 8.

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.