

# AMORIS LAETITIA



Amoris Laetitia Family  
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## REFLECTION QUESTIONS CHAPTER 6

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- 1. What suggestions can you offer to accompany young people in their preparation for marriage?**
- 2. How can newlyweds be supported in the early years of their marriage?**
- 3. How can the parish community support those who are divorced/separated and their children?**

Questions adapted from the CCCB's Office for Evangelization and Catechesis, Webcast Series on *Amoris Laetitia*, 2015.



Office for Family and Life  
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

## CHAPTER SIX

### SOME PASTORAL PERSPECTIVES

199. The dialogue that took place during the Synod raised the need for new pastoral methods. I will attempt to mention some of these in a very general way. Different communities will have to devise more practical and effective initiatives that respect both the Church's teaching and local problems and needs. Without claiming to present a pastoral plan for the family, I would now like to reflect on some more significant pastoral challenges.

#### PROCLAIMING THE GOSPEL OF THE FAMILY TODAY

200. The Synod Fathers emphasized that Christian families, by the grace of the sacrament of matrimony, are the principal agents of the family apostolate, above all through “their joy-filled witness as domestic churches”.<sup>225</sup> Consequently, “it is important that people experience the Gospel of the family as a joy that ‘fills hearts and lives’, because in Christ we have been ‘set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness’ (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 1). As in the parable of the sower (cf. *Mt* 13:3-9), we are called to help sow seeds; the rest is God's work. Nor must we forget that, in her teaching on the family, the Church is a sign of contradiction”.<sup>226</sup> Married couples are grateful that their pastors uphold the high ideal of a love that is strong, solid, enduring and capable of sustaining

<sup>225</sup> *Relatio Synodi* 2014, 30.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

them through whatever trials they may have to face. The Church wishes, with humility and compassion, to reach out to families and “to help each family to discover the best way to overcome any obstacles it encounters”.<sup>227</sup> It is not enough to show generic concern for the family in pastoral planning. Enabling families to take up their role as active agents of the family apostolate calls for “an effort at evangelization and catechesis inside the family”.<sup>228</sup>

201. “This effort calls for missionary conversion by everyone in the Church, that is, one that is not content to proclaim a merely theoretical message without connection to people’s real problems”.<sup>229</sup> Pastoral care for families “needs to make it clear that the Gospel of the family responds to the deepest expectations of the human person: a response to each one’s dignity and fulfilment in reciprocity, communion and fruitfulness. This consists not merely in presenting a set of rules, but in proposing values that are clearly needed today, even in the most secularized of countries”.<sup>230</sup> The Synod Fathers also “highlighted the fact that evangelization needs unambiguously to denounce cultural, social, political and economic factors – such as the excessive importance given to market logic – that prevent authentic family life and lead to discrimination, poverty, exclusion, and violence. Consequently, dialogue and cooperation need to be fostered with societal structures and encouragement given to lay

<sup>227</sup> *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 56.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>229</sup> *Relatio Synodi* 2014, 32.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

people who are involved, as Christians, in the cultural and socio-political fields”.<sup>231</sup>

202. “The main contribution to the pastoral care of families is offered by the parish, which is the family of families, where small communities, ecclesial movements and associations live in harmony”.<sup>232</sup> Along with a pastoral outreach aimed specifically at families, this shows the need for “a more adequate formation... of priests, deacons, men and women religious, catechists and other pastoral workers”.<sup>233</sup> In the replies given to the worldwide consultation, it became clear that ordained ministers often lack the training needed to deal with the complex problems currently facing families. The experience of the broad Oriental tradition of a married clergy could also be drawn upon.

203. Seminarians should receive a more extensive interdisciplinary, and not merely doctrinal, formation in the areas of engagement and marriage. Their training does not always allow them to explore their own psychological and affective background and experiences. Some come from troubled families, with absent parents and a lack of emotional stability. There is a need to ensure that the formation process can enable them to attain the maturity and psychological balance needed for their future ministry. Family bonds are essential for reinforcing healthy self-esteem. It is important for families to be part of the seminary process and priestly life, since they help

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>232</sup> *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 77.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

to reaffirm these and to keep them well grounded in reality. It is helpful for seminarians to combine time in the seminary with time spent in parishes. There they can have greater contact with the concrete realities of family life, since in their future ministry they will largely be dealing with families. “The presence of lay people, families and especially the presence of women in priestly formation, promotes an appreciation of the diversity and complementarity of the different vocations in the Church”.<sup>234</sup>

204. The response to the consultation also insisted on the need for training lay leaders who can assist in the pastoral care of families, with the help of teachers and counsellors, family and community physicians, social workers, juvenile and family advocates, and drawing upon the contributions of psychology, sociology, marital therapy and counselling. Professionals, especially those with practical experience, help keep pastoral initiatives grounded in the real situations and concrete concerns of families. “Courses and programmes, planned specifically for pastoral workers, can be of assistance by integrating the premarital preparation programme into the broader dynamic of ecclesial life”.<sup>235</sup> Good pastoral training is important “especially in light of particular emergency situations arising from cases of domestic violence and sexual abuse”.<sup>236</sup> All this in no way diminishes, but rather complements, the fundamental value of spiritual direction, the rich spiritual treasures of the Church, and sacramental Reconciliation.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*

## PREPARING ENGAGED COUPLES FOR MARRIAGE

205. The Synod Fathers stated in a number of ways that we need to help young people discover the dignity and beauty of marriage.<sup>237</sup> They should be helped to perceive the attraction of a complete union that elevates and perfects the social dimension of existence, gives sexuality its deepest meaning, and benefits children by offering them the best context for their growth and development.

206. “The complexity of today’s society and the challenges faced by the family require a greater effort on the part of the whole Christian community in preparing those who are about to be married. The importance of the virtues needs to be included. Among these, chastity proves invaluable for the genuine growth of love between persons. In this regard, the Synod Fathers agreed on the need to involve the entire community more extensively by stressing the witness of families themselves and by grounding marriage preparation in the process of Christian initiation by bringing out the connection between marriage, baptism and the other sacraments. The Fathers also spoke of the need for specific programmes of marriage preparation aimed at giving couples a genuine experience of participation in ecclesial life and a complete introduction to various aspects of family life”.<sup>238</sup>

207. I encourage Christian communities to recognize the great benefit that they themselves receive from supporting

<sup>237</sup> Cf. *Relatio Synodi* 2014, 26.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

engaged couples as they grow in love. As the Italian bishops have observed, those couples are “a valuable resource because, as they sincerely commit themselves to grow in love and self-giving, they can help renew the fabric of the whole ecclesial body. Their special form of friendship can prove contagious and foster the growth of friendship and fraternity in the Christian community of which they are a part”.<sup>239</sup> There are a number of legitimate ways to structure programmes of marriage preparation, and each local Church will discern how best to provide a suitable formation without distancing young people from the sacrament. They do not need to be taught the entire Catechism or overwhelmed with too much information. Here too, “it is not great knowledge, but rather the ability to feel and relish things interiorly that contents and satisfies the soul”.<sup>240</sup> Quality is more important than quantity, and priority should be given – along with a renewed proclamation of the kerygma – to an attractive and helpful presentation of information that can help couples to live the rest of their lives together “with great courage and generosity”.<sup>241</sup> Marriage preparation should be a kind of “initiation” to the sacrament of matrimony, providing couples with the help they need to receive the sacrament worthily and to make a solid beginning of life as a family.

<sup>239</sup> ITALIAN BISHOPS’ CONFERENCE, Episcopal Commission on Family and Life, *Orientamenti pastorali sulla preparazione al matrimonio e alla famiglia* (22 October 2012), 1.

<sup>240</sup> IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA, *Spiritual Exercises*, Annotation 2.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, Annotation 5.

208. With the help of missionary families, the couple's own families and a variety of pastoral resources, ways should also be found to offer a remote preparation that, by example and good advice, can help their love to grow and mature. Discussion groups and optional talks on a variety of topics of genuine interest to young people can also prove helpful. All the same, some individual meetings remain essential, since the primary objective is to help each to learn how to love this very real person with whom he or she plans to share his or her whole life. Learning to love someone does not happen automatically, nor can it be taught in a workshop just prior to the celebration of marriage. For every couple, marriage preparation begins at birth. What they received from their family should prepare them to know themselves and to make a full and definitive commitment. Those best prepared for marriage are probably those who learned what Christian marriage is from their own parents, who chose each other unconditionally and daily renew this decision. In this sense, pastoral initiatives aimed at helping married couples to grow in love and in the Gospel of the family also help their children, by preparing them for their future married life. Nor should we underestimate the pastoral value of traditional religious practices. To give just one example: I think of Saint Valentine's Day; in some countries, commercial interests are quicker to see the potential of this celebration than are we in the Church.

209. The timely preparation of engaged couples by the parish community should also assist them to recognize eventual problems and risks. In this way, they can come to realize the wisdom of breaking off a relationship whose failure and

painful aftermath can be foreseen. In their initial enchantment with one another, couples can attempt to conceal or relativize certain things and to avoid disagreements; only later do problems surface. For this reason, they should be strongly encouraged to discuss what each expects from marriage, what they understand by love and commitment, what each wants from the other and what kind of life they would like to build together. Such discussions would help them to see if they in fact have little in common and to realize that mutual attraction alone will not suffice to keep them together. Nothing is more volatile, precarious and unpredictable than desire. The decision to marry should never be encouraged unless the couple has discerned deeper reasons that will ensure a genuine and stable commitment.

210. In any event, if one partner clearly recognizes the other's weak points, he or she needs to have a realistic trust in the possibility of helping to develop the good points that counterbalance them, and in this way to foster their human growth. This entails a willingness to face eventual sacrifices, problems and situations of conflict; it demands a firm resolve to be ready for this. Couples need to be able to detect danger signals in their relationship and to find, before the wedding, effective ways of responding to them. Sadly, many couples marry without really knowing one another. They have enjoyed each other's company and done things together, but without facing the challenge of revealing themselves and coming to know who the other person truly is.

211. Both short-term and long-term marriage preparation should ensure that the couple do not view the wedding ceremony as the end of the road, but instead embark upon marriage as a lifelong calling based on a firm and realistic decision to face all trials and difficult moments together. The pastoral care of engaged and married couples should be centred on the marriage bond, assisting couples not only to deepen their love but also to overcome problems and difficulties. This involves not only helping them to accept the Church's teaching and to have recourse to her valuable resources, but also offering practical programmes, sound advice, proven strategies and psychological guidance. All this calls for a pedagogy of love, attuned to the feelings and needs of young people and capable of helping them to grow interiorly. Marriage preparation should also provide couples with the names of places, people and services to which they can turn for help when problems arise. It is also important to remind them of the availability of the sacrament of Reconciliation, which allows them to bring their sins and past mistakes, and their relationship itself, before God, and to receive in turn his merciful forgiveness and healing strength.

*The preparation of the celebration*

212. Short-term preparations for marriage tend to be concentrated on invitations, clothes, the party and any number of other details that tend to drain not only the budget but energy and joy as well. The spouses come to the wedding ceremony exhausted and harried, rather than focused and ready for the great step that they are about to take. The same kind of preoccupation with a big celebration also affects

certain de facto unions; because of the expenses involved, the couple, instead of being concerned above all with their love and solemnizing it in the presence of others, never get married. Here let me say a word to fiancés. Have the courage to be different. Don't let yourselves get swallowed up by a society of consumption and empty appearances. What is important is the love you share, strengthened and sanctified by grace. You are capable of opting for a more modest and simple celebration in which love takes precedence over everything else. Pastoral workers and the entire community can help make this priority the norm rather than the exception.

213. In their preparation for marriage, the couple should be encouraged to make the liturgical celebration a profound personal experience and to appreciate the meaning of each of its signs. In the case of two baptized persons, the commitment expressed by the words of consent and the bodily union that consummates the marriage can only be seen as signs of the covenantal love and union between the incarnate Son of God and his Church. In the baptized, words and signs become an eloquent language of faith. The body, created with a God-given meaning, “becomes the language of the ministers of the sacrament, aware that in the conjugal pact there is expressed and realized the mystery that has its origin in God himself”.<sup>242</sup>

214. At times, the couple do not grasp the theological and spiritual import of the words of consent, which illuminate the meaning of all the signs that follow. It needs to be stressed

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<sup>242</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Catechesis (27 June 1984), 4: *Insegnamenti* VII/1 (1984), 1941.

that these words cannot be reduced to the present; they involve a totality that includes the future: “until death do us part”. The content of the words of consent makes it clear that “freedom and fidelity are not opposed to one another; rather, they are mutually supportive, both in interpersonal and social relationships. Indeed, let us consider the damage caused, in our culture of global communication, by the escalation of unkept promises... Honouring one’s word, fidelity to one’s promises: these are things that cannot be bought and sold. They cannot be compelled by force or maintained without sacrifice”.<sup>243</sup>

215. The Kenyan Bishops have observed that “many [young people] concentrate on their wedding day and forget the life-long commitment they are about to enter into”.<sup>244</sup> They need to be encouraged to see the sacrament not as a single moment that then becomes a part of the past and its memories, but rather as a reality that permanently influences the whole of married life.<sup>245</sup> The procreative meaning of sexuality, the language of the body, and the signs of love shown throughout married life all become an “uninterrupted continuity of liturgical language” and “conjugal life becomes in a certain sense liturgical”.<sup>246</sup>

<sup>243</sup> Catechesis (21 October 2015): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 22 October 2015, p. 12.

<sup>244</sup> KENYA CONFERENCE OF CATHOLIC BISHOPS, *Lenten Message* (18 February 2015).

<sup>245</sup> Cf. PIUS XI, Encyclical Letter *Casti Connubii* (31 December 1930): AAS 22 (1930), 583.

<sup>246</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Catechesis (4 July 1984), 3, 6: *Insegnamenti VII/2* (1984), pp. 9, 10.

216. The couple can also meditate on the biblical readings and the meaningfulness of the rings they will exchange and the other signs that are part of the rite. Nor would it be good for them to arrive at the wedding without ever having prayed together, one for the other, to seek God's help in remaining faithful and generous, to ask the Lord together what he wants of them, and to consecrate their love before an image of the Virgin Mary. Those who help prepare them for marriage should help them experience these moments of prayer that can prove so beneficial. "The marriage liturgy is a unique event, which is both a family and a community celebration. The first signs of Jesus were performed at the wedding feast of Cana. The good wine, resulting from the Lord's miracle that brought joy to the beginning of a new family, is the new wine of Christ's covenant with the men and women of every age... Frequently, the celebrant speaks to a congregation that includes people who seldom participate in the life of the Church, or who are members of other Christian denominations or religious communities. The occasion thus provides a valuable opportunity to proclaim the Gospel of Christ".<sup>247</sup>

#### ACCOMPANYING THE FIRST YEARS OF MARRIED LIFE

217. It is important that marriage be seen as a matter of love, that only those who freely choose and love one another may marry. When love is merely physical attraction or a vague affection, spouses become particularly vulnerable once this

<sup>247</sup> *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 59.

affection wanes or physical attraction diminishes. Given the frequency with which this happens, it is all the more essential that couples be helped during the first years of their married life to enrich and deepen their conscious and free decision to have, hold and love one another for life. Often the engagement period is not long enough, the decision is precipitated for various reasons and, what is even more problematic, the couple themselves are insufficiently mature. As a result, the newly married couple need to complete a process that should have taken place during their engagement.

218. Another great challenge of marriage preparation is to help couples realize that marriage is not something that happens once for all. Their union is real and irrevocable, confirmed and consecrated by the sacrament of matrimony. Yet in joining their lives, the spouses assume an active and creative role in a lifelong project. Their gaze now has to be directed to the future that, with the help of God's grace, they are daily called to build. For this very reason, neither spouse can expect the other to be perfect. Each must set aside all illusions and accept the other as he or she actually is: an unfinished product, needing to grow, a work in progress. A persistently critical attitude towards one's partner is a sign that marriage was not entered into as a project to be worked on together, with patience, understanding, tolerance and generosity. Slowly but surely, love will then give way to constant questioning and criticism, dwelling on each other's good and bad points, issuing ultimatums and engaging in competition and self-justification. The couple then prove incapable of helping one another to build a mature union. This fact needs

to be realistically presented to newly married couples from the outset, so that they can grasp that the wedding is “just the beginning”. By saying “I do”, they embark on a journey that requires them to overcome all obstacles standing in the way of their reaching the goal. The nuptial blessing that they receive is a grace and an incentive for this journey. They can only benefit from sitting down and talking to one another about how, concretely, they plan to achieve their goal.

219. I recall an old saying: still water becomes stagnant and good for nothing. If, in the first years of marriage, a couple’s experience of love grows stagnant, it loses the very excitement that should be its propelling force. Young love needs to keep dancing towards the future with immense hope. Hope is the leaven that, in those first years of engagement and marriage, makes it possible to look beyond arguments, conflicts and problems and to see things in a broader perspective. It harnesses our uncertainties and concerns so that growth can take place. Hope also bids us live fully in the present, giving our all to the life of the family, for the best way to prepare a solid future is to live well in the present.

220. This process occurs in various stages that call for generosity and sacrifice. The first powerful feelings of attraction give way to the realization that the other is now a part of my life. The pleasure of belonging to one another leads to seeing life as a common project, putting the other’s happiness ahead of my own, and realizing with joy that this marriage enriches society. As love matures, it also learns to “negotiate”. Far from anything selfish or calculating, such negotiation is an exercise

of mutual love, an interplay of give and take, for the good of the family. At each new stage of married life, there is a need to sit down and renegotiate agreements, so that there will be no winners and losers, but rather two winners. In the home, decisions cannot be made unilaterally, since each spouse shares responsibility for the family; yet each home is unique and each marriage will find an arrangement that works best.

221. Among the causes of broken marriages are unduly high expectations about conjugal life. Once it becomes apparent that the reality is more limited and challenging than one imagined, the solution is not to think quickly and irresponsibly about separation, but to come to the sober realization that married life is a process of growth, in which each spouse is God's means of helping the other to mature. Change, improvement, the flowering of the good qualities present in each person – all these are possible. Each marriage is a kind of “salvation history”, which from fragile beginnings – thanks to God's gift and a creative and generous response on our part – grows over time into something precious and enduring. Might we say that the greatest mission of two people in love is to help one another become, respectively, more a man and more a woman? Fostering growth means helping a person to shape his or her own identity. Love is thus a kind of craftsmanship. When we read in the Bible about the creation of man and woman, we see God first forming

Adam (cf. *Gen 2:7*); he realizes that something essential is lacking and so he forms Eve and then hears the man exclaim in amazement, “Yes, this one is just right for me!” We can almost hear the amazing dialogue that must have taken place when the man and the woman first encountered one another. In the life of married couples, even at difficult moments, one person can always surprise the other, and new doors can open for their relationship, as if they were meeting for the first time. At every new stage, they can keep “forming” one another. Love makes each wait for the other with the patience of a craftsman, a patience which comes from God.

222. The pastoral care of newly married couples must also involve encouraging them to be generous in bestowing life. “In accord with the personal and fully human character of conjugal love, family planning fittingly takes place as the result of a consensual dialogue between the spouses, respect for times and consideration of the dignity of the partner. In this sense, the teaching of the Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (cf. 1014) and the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (cf. 14; 2835) ought to be taken up anew, in order to counter a mentality that is often hostile to life... Decisions involving responsible parenthood presuppose the formation of conscience, which is ‘the most secret core and sanctuary of a person. There each one is alone with God, whose voice echoes in the depths of the heart’ (*Gaudium et Spes*, 16). The more the couple tries to listen in conscience to God and his commandments (cf. *Rom 2:15*), and is accompanied spiritually, the more their decision will be profoundly free of subjective

caprice and accommodation to prevailing social mores”.<sup>248</sup> The clear teaching of the Second Vatican Council still holds: “[The couple] will make decisions by common counsel and effort. Let them thoughtfully take into account both their own welfare and that of their children, those already born and those which the future may bring. For this accounting they need to reckon with both the material and the spiritual conditions of the times as well as of their state in life. Finally, they should consult the interests of the family group, of temporal society and of the Church herself. The parents themselves and no one else should ultimately make this judgment in the sight of God”.<sup>249</sup> Moreover, “the use of methods based on the ‘laws of nature and the incidence of fertility’ (*Humanae Vitae*, 11) are to be promoted, since ‘these methods respect the bodies of the spouses, encourage tenderness between them and favour the education of an authentic freedom’ (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2370). Greater emphasis needs to be placed on the fact that children are a wonderful gift from God and a joy for parents and the Church. Through them, the Lord renews the world”.<sup>250</sup>

### *Some resources*

223. The Synod Fathers observed that “the initial years of marriage are a vital and sensitive period during which couples become more aware of the challenges and meaning of married

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>249</sup> SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 50.

<sup>250</sup> *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 63.

life. Consequently, pastoral accompaniment needs to go beyond the actual celebration of the sacrament (*Familiaris Consortio*, Part III). In this regard, experienced couples have an important role to play. The parish is a place where such experienced couples can help younger couples, with the eventual cooperation of associations, ecclesial movements and new communities. Young couples need to be encouraged to be essentially open to the great gift of children. Emphasis should also be given to the importance of family spirituality, prayer and participation in the Sunday Eucharist, and couples encouraged to meet regularly to promote growth in their spiritual life and solidarity in the concrete demands of life. Liturgies, devotional practices and the Eucharist celebrated for families, especially on the wedding anniversary, were mentioned as vital factors in fostering evangelization through the family”.<sup>251</sup>

224. This process takes time. Love needs time and space; everything else is secondary. Time is needed to talk things over, to embrace leisurely, to share plans, to listen to one other and gaze into each other’s eyes, to appreciate one another and to build a stronger relationship. Sometimes the frenetic pace of our society and the pressures of the workplace create problems. At other times, the problem is the lack of quality time together, sharing the same room without one even noticing the other. Pastoral workers and groups of married people should think of ways to help young or vulnerable

<sup>251</sup> *Relatio Synodi* 2014, 40.

couples to make the most of those moments, to be present to one another, even by sharing moments of meaningful silence.

225. Couples who have learned how to do this well can share some practical suggestions which they have found useful: planning free time together, moments of recreation with the children, different ways of celebrating important events, shared opportunities for spiritual growth. They can also provide resources that help young married couples to make those moments meaningful and loving, and thus to improve their communication. This is extremely important for the stage when the novelty of marriage has worn off. Once a couple no longer know how to spend time together, one or both of them will end up taking refuge in gadgets, finding other commitments, seeking the embrace of another, or simply looking for ways to flee what has become an uncomfortable closeness.

226. Young married couples should be encouraged to develop a routine that gives a healthy sense of closeness and stability through shared daily rituals. These could include a morning kiss, an evening blessing, waiting at the door to welcome each other home, taking trips together and sharing household chores. Yet it also helps to break the routine with a party, and to enjoy family celebrations of anniversaries and special events. We need these moments of cherishing God's gifts and renewing our zest for life. As long as we can celebrate, we are able to rekindle our love, to free it from monotony and to colour our daily routine with hope.

227. We pastors have to encourage families to grow in faith. This means encouraging frequent confession, spiritual direction and occasional retreats. It also means encouraging family prayer during the week, since “the family that prays together stays together”. When visiting our people’s homes, we should gather all the members of the family and briefly pray for one another, placing the family in the Lord’s hands. It is also helpful to encourage each of the spouses to find time for prayer alone with God, since each has his or her secret crosses to bear. Why shouldn’t we tell God our troubles and ask him to grant us the healing and help we need to remain faithful? The Synod Fathers noted that “the word of God is the source of life and spirituality for the family. All pastoral work on behalf of the family must allow people to be interiorly fashioned and formed as members of the domestic church through the Church’s prayerful reading of sacred Scripture. The word of God is not only good news in a person’s private life but also a criterion of judgement and a light in discerning the various challenges that married couples and families encounter”.<sup>252</sup>

228. In some cases, one of the spouses is not baptized or does not want to practise the faith. This can make the other’s desire to live and grow in the Christian life difficult and at times painful. Still, some common values can be found and these can be shared and relished. In any event, showing love for a spouse who is not a believer, bestowing happiness, soothing hurts and sharing life together represents a true path of sanctification. Love is always a gift of God. Wherever it

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

is poured out, it makes its transforming presence felt, often in mysterious ways, even to the point that “the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband” (1 Cor 7:14).

229. Parishes, movements, schools and other Church institutions can help in a variety of ways to support families and help them grow. These might include meetings of couples living in the same neighbourhood; brief retreats for couples; talks by experts on concrete issues facing families; marriage counselling; home missionaries who help couples discuss their difficulties and desires; social services dealing with family problems like addiction, infidelity and domestic violence; programmes of spiritual growth; workshops for parents with troubled children; and family meetings. The parish office should be prepared to deal helpfully and sensitively with family needs and be able to make referrals, when necessary, to those who can help. There is also the contribution made by groups of married couples that provide assistance as part of their commitment to service, prayer, formation and mutual support. Such groups enable couples to be generous, to assist other families and to share the faith; at the same time they strengthen marriages and help them to grow.

230. It is true that many couples, once married, drop out of the Christian community. Often, however, we ourselves do not take advantage of those occasions when they do return, to remind them of the beautiful ideal of Christian marriage and the support that our parishes can offer them. I think, for example, of the Baptism and First Holy Communion of

their children, or the funerals or weddings of their relatives or friends. Almost all married couples reappear on these occasions, and we should take greater advantage of this. Another way of growing closer is by blessing homes or by bringing a pilgrim image of Our Lady to houses in the neighbourhood; this provides an opportunity for a pastoral conversation about the family's situation. It could also be helpful to ask older married couples to help younger couples in the neighbourhood by visiting them and offering guidance in the early years of marriage. Given the pace of life today, most couples cannot attend frequent meetings; still, we cannot restrict our pastoral outreach to small and select groups. Nowadays, pastoral care for families has to be fundamentally missionary, going out to where people are. We can no longer be like a factory, churning out courses that for the most part are poorly attended.

#### CASTING LIGHT ON CRISES, WORRIES AND DIFFICULTIES

231. A word should also be said about those whose love, like a fine wine, has come into its own. Just as a good wine begins to “breathe” with time, so too the daily experience of fidelity gives married life richness and “body”. Fidelity has to do with patience and expectation. Its joys and sacrifices bear fruit as the years go by and the couple rejoice to see their children's children. The love present from the beginning becomes more conscious, settled and mature as the couple discover each other anew day after day, year after year. Saint John of the Cross tells us that “old lovers are tried and true”. They “are outwardly no longer afire with powerful emotions and impulses, but now taste the sweetness of the wine of

love, well-aged and stored deep within their hearts”.<sup>253</sup> Such couples have successfully overcome crises and hardships without fleeing from challenges or concealing problems.

### *The challenge of crises*

232. The life of every family is marked by all kinds of crises, yet these are also part of its dramatic beauty. Couples should be helped to realize that surmounting a crisis need not weaken their relationship; instead, it can improve, settle and mature the wine of their union. Life together should not diminish but increase their contentment; every new step along the way can help couples find new ways to happiness. Each crisis becomes an apprenticeship in growing closer together or learning a little more about what it means to be married. There is no need for couples to resign themselves to an inevitable downward spiral or a tolerable mediocrity. On the contrary, when marriage is seen as a challenge that involves overcoming obstacles, each crisis becomes an opportunity to let the wine of their relationship age and improve. Couples will gain from receiving help in facing crises, meeting challenges and acknowledging them as part of family life. Experienced and trained couples should be open to offering guidance, so the couples will not be unnerved by these crises or tempted to hasty decisions. Each crisis has a lesson to teach us; we need to learn how to listen for it with the ear of the heart.

233. Faced with a crisis, we tend first to react defensively, since we feel that we are losing control, or are somehow at

<sup>253</sup> *Cántico Espiritual* B, XXV, 11.

fault, and this makes us uneasy. We resort to denying the problem, hiding or downplaying it, and hoping that it will go away. But this does not help; it only makes things worse, wastes energy and delays a solution. Couples grow apart and lose their ability to communicate. When problems are not dealt with, communication is the first thing to go. Little by little, “the person I love” slowly becomes “my mate”, then just “the father or mother of my children”, and finally a stranger.

234. Crises need to be faced together. This is hard, since persons sometimes withdraw in order to avoid saying what they feel; they retreat into a craven silence. At these times, it becomes all the more important to create opportunities for speaking heart to heart. Unless a couple learn to do this, they will find it harder and harder as time passes. Communication is an art learned in moments of peace in order to be practised in moments of difficulty. Spouses need help in discovering their deepest thoughts and feelings and expressing them. Like childbirth, this is a painful process that brings forth a new treasure. The answers given to the pre-synodal consultation showed that most people in difficult or critical situations do not seek pastoral assistance, since they do not find it sympathetic, realistic or concerned for individual cases. This should spur us to try to approach marriage crises with greater sensitivity to their burden of hurt and anxiety.

235. Some crises are typical of almost every marriage. Newly married couples need to learn how to accept their differences and to disengage from their parents. The arrival

of a child presents new emotional challenges. Raising small children necessitates a change of lifestyle, while the onset of adolescence causes strain, frustration and even tension between parents. An “empty nest” obliges a couple to redefine their relationship, while the need to care for aging parents involves making difficult decisions in their regard. All these are demanding situations that can cause apprehension, feelings of guilt, depression and fatigue, with serious repercussions on a marriage.

236. Then there are those personal crises that affect the life of couples, often involving finances, problems in the workplace, emotional, social and spiritual difficulties. Unexpected situations present themselves, disrupting family life and requiring a process of forgiveness and reconciliation. In resolving sincerely to forgive the other, each has to ask quietly and humbly if he or she has not somehow created the conditions that led to the other’s mistakes. Some families break up when spouses engage in mutual recrimination, but “experience shows that with proper assistance and acts of reconciliation, through grace, a great percentage of troubled marriages find a solution in a satisfying manner. To know how to forgive and to feel forgiven is a basic experience in family life”.<sup>254</sup> “The arduous art of reconciliation, which requires the support of grace, needs the generous cooperation of relatives and friends, and sometimes even outside help and professional assistance”.<sup>255</sup>

<sup>254</sup> *Relatio Synodi* 2014, 44.

<sup>255</sup> *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 81.

237. It is becoming more and more common to think that, when one or both partners no longer feel fulfilled, or things have not turned out the way they wanted, sufficient reason exists to end the marriage. Were this the case, no marriage would last. At times, all it takes to decide that everything is over is a single instance of dissatisfaction, the absence of the other when he or she was most needed, wounded pride or a vague fear. Inevitably, situations will arise involving human weakness, and these can prove emotionally overwhelming. One spouse may not feel fully appreciated, or may be attracted to another person. Jealousy and tensions may emerge, or new interests that consume the other's time and attention. Physical changes naturally occur in everyone. These, and so many other things, rather than threatening love, are so many occasions for reviving and renewing it.

238. In such situations, some have the maturity needed to reaffirm their choice of the other as their partner on life's journey, despite the limitations of the relationship. They realistically accept that the other cannot fulfill all their cherished dreams. Persons like this avoid thinking of themselves as martyrs; they make the most of whatever possibilities family life gives them and they work patiently at strengthening the marriage bond. They realize, after all, that every crisis can be a new "yes", enabling love to be renewed, deepened and inwardly strengthened. When crises come, they are unafraid to get to the root of it, to renegotiate basic terms, to achieve a new equilibrium and to move forward together.

With this kind of constant openness they are able to face any number of difficult situations. In any event, while realizing that reconciliation is a possibility, we also see that “what is urgently needed today is a ministry to care for those whose marital relationship has broken down”.<sup>256</sup>

### *Old wounds*

239. Understandably, families often experience problems when one of their members is emotionally immature because he or she still bears the scars of earlier experiences. An unhappy childhood or adolescence can breed personal crises that affect one’s marriage. Were everyone mature and normal, crises would be less frequent or less painful. Yet the fact is that only in their forties do some people achieve a maturity that should have come at the end of adolescence. Some love with the selfish, capricious and self-centred love of a child: an insatiable love that screams or cries when it fails to get what it wants. Others love with an adolescent love marked by hostility, bitter criticism and the need to blame others; caught up in their own emotions and fantasies, such persons expect others to fill their emptiness and to satisfy their every desire.

240. Many people leave childhood without ever having felt unconditional love. This affects their ability to be trusting and open with others. A poor relationship with one’s parents and siblings, if left unhealed, can re-emerge and hurt a marriage. Unresolved issues need to be dealt with and a process of liberation must take place. When problems

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

emerge in a marriage, before important decisions are made it is important to ensure that each spouse has come to grips with his or her own history. This involves recognizing a need for healing, insistent prayer for the grace to forgive and be forgiven, a willingness to accept help, and the determination not to give up but to keep trying. A sincere self-examination will make it possible to see how one's own shortcomings and immaturity affect the relationship. Even if it seems clear that the other person is at fault, a crisis will never be overcome simply by expecting him or her to change. We also have to ask what in our own life needs to grow or heal if the conflict is to be resolved.

*Accompaniment after breakdown and divorce*

241. In some cases, respect for one's own dignity and the good of the children requires not giving in to excessive demands or preventing a grave injustice, violence or chronic ill-treatment. In such cases, "separation becomes inevitable. At times it even becomes morally necessary, precisely when it is a matter of removing the more vulnerable spouse or young children from serious injury due to abuse and violence, from humiliation and exploitation, and from disregard and indifference".<sup>257</sup> Even so, "separation must be considered as a last resort, after all other reasonable attempts at reconciliation have proved vain".<sup>258</sup>

<sup>257</sup> Catechesis (24 June 2015): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 25 June 2015, p. 8.

<sup>258</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), 83: AAS 74 (1982), 184.

242. The Synod Fathers noted that “special discernment is indispensable for the pastoral care of those who are separated, divorced or abandoned. Respect needs to be shown especially for the sufferings of those who have unjustly endured separation, divorce or abandonment, or those who have been forced by maltreatment from a husband or a wife to interrupt their life together. To forgive such an injustice that has been suffered is not easy, but grace makes this journey possible. Pastoral care must necessarily include efforts at reconciliation and mediation, through the establishment of specialized counselling centres in dioceses”.<sup>259</sup> At the same time, “divorced people who have not remarried, and often bear witness to marital fidelity, ought to be encouraged to find in the Eucharist the nourishment they need to sustain them in their present state of life. The local community and pastors should accompany these people with solicitude, particularly when children are involved or when they are in serious financial difficulty”.<sup>260</sup> Family breakdown becomes even more traumatic and painful in the case of the poor, since they have far fewer resources at hand for starting a new life. A poor person, once removed from a secure family environment, is doubly vulnerable to abandonment and possible harm.

243. It is important that the divorced who have entered a new union should be made to feel part of the Church. “They are not excommunicated” and they should not be treated as such, since they remain part of the ecclesial community.<sup>261</sup>

<sup>259</sup> *Relatio Synodi* 2014, 47.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>261</sup> Catechesis (5 August 2015): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 6 August 2015, p. 7.

These situations “require careful discernment and respectful accompaniment. Language or conduct that might lead them to feel discriminated against should be avoided, and they should be encouraged to participate in the life of the community. The Christian community’s care of such persons is not to be considered a weakening of its faith and testimony to the indissolubility of marriage; rather, such care is a particular expression of its charity”.<sup>262</sup>

244. A large number of Synod Fathers also “emphasized the need to make the procedure in cases of nullity more accessible and less time consuming, and, if possible, free of charge”.<sup>263</sup> The slowness of the process causes distress and strain on the parties. My two recent documents dealing with this issue<sup>264</sup> have simplified the procedures for the declarations of matrimonial nullity. With these, I wished “to make clear that the bishop himself, in the Church over which he has been appointed shepherd and head, is by that very fact the judge of those faithful entrusted to his care”.<sup>265</sup> “The implementation of these documents is therefore a great responsibility for Ordinaries in dioceses, who are called upon to judge some cases themselves and, in every case, to ensure the faithful an easier access to justice. This involves preparing a sufficient staff, composed of clerics and lay persons who are primarily

<sup>262</sup> *Relatio Synodi* 2014, 51; cf. *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 84.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>264</sup> Motu Proprio *Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus* (15 August 2015): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 9 September 2015, pp. 3-4; cf. Motu Proprio *Mitis et Misericors Iesus* (15 August 2015): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 9 September 2015, pp. 5-6.

<sup>265</sup> Motu Proprio *Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus* (15 August 2015), Preamble, III: *L’Osservatore Romano*, 9 September 2015, p. 3.

deputed to this ecclesial service. Information, counselling and mediation services associated with the family apostolate should also be made available to individuals who are separated or couples in crisis. These services could also include meeting with individuals in view of the preliminary inquiry of a matrimonial process (cf. *Mitis Index*, art. 2-3).<sup>266</sup>

245. The Synod Fathers also pointed to “the consequences of separation or divorce on children, in every case the innocent victims of the situation”.<sup>267</sup> Apart from every other consideration, the good of children should be the primary concern, and not overshadowed by any ulterior interest or objective. I make this appeal to parents who are separated: “Never ever, take your child hostage! You separated for many problems and reasons. Life gave you this trial, but your children should not have to bear the burden of this separation or be used as hostages against the other spouse. They should grow up hearing their mother speak well of their father, even though they are not together, and their father speak well of their mother”.<sup>268</sup> It is irresponsible to disparage the other parent as a means of winning a child’s affection, or out of revenge or self-justification. Doing so will affect the child’s interior tranquility and cause wounds hard to heal.

246. The Church, while appreciating the situations of conflict that are part of marriage, cannot fail to speak out on behalf of those who are most vulnerable: the children who

<sup>266</sup> *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 82.

<sup>267</sup> *Relatio Synodi* 2014, 47.

<sup>268</sup> Catechesis (20 May 2015): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 21 May 2015, p. 8.

often suffer in silence. Today, “despite our seemingly evolved sensibilities and all our refined psychological analyses, I ask myself if we are not becoming numb to the hurt in children’s souls... Do we feel the immense psychological burden borne by children in families where the members mistreat and hurt one another, to the point of breaking the bonds of marital fidelity?”<sup>269</sup> Such harmful experiences do not help children to grow in the maturity needed to make definitive commitments. For this reason, Christian communities must not abandon divorced parents who have entered a new union, but should include and support them in their efforts to bring up their children. “How can we encourage those parents to do everything possible to raise their children in the Christian life, to give them an example of committed and practical faith, if we keep them at arm’s length from the life of the community, as if they were somehow excommunicated? We must keep from acting in a way that adds even more to the burdens that children in these situations already have to bear!”<sup>270</sup> Helping heal the wounds of parents and supporting them spiritually is also beneficial for children, who need the familiar face of the Church to see them through this traumatic experience. Divorce is an evil and the increasing number of divorces is very troubling. Hence, our most important pastoral task with regard to families is to strengthen their love, helping to heal wounds and working to prevent the spread of this drama of our times.

<sup>269</sup> Catechesis (24 June 2015): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 25 June 2015, p. 8.

<sup>270</sup> Catechesis (5 August 2015): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 6 August 2015, p. 7.

*Certain complex situations*

247. “Issues involving mixed marriages require particular attention. Marriages between Catholics and other baptized persons ‘have their own particular nature, but they contain numerous elements that could well be made good use of and developed, both for their intrinsic value and for the contribution that they can make to the ecumenical movement’. For this purpose, ‘an effort should be made to establish cordial cooperation between the Catholic and the non-Catholic ministers from the time that preparations begin for the marriage and the wedding ceremony’ (*Familiaris Consortio*, 78). With regard to sharing in the Eucharist, ‘the decision as to whether the non-Catholic party of the marriage may be admitted to Eucharistic communion is to be made in keeping with the general norms existing in the matter, both for Eastern Christians and for other Christians, taking into account the particular situation of the reception of the sacrament of matrimony by two baptized Christians. Although the spouses in a mixed marriage share the sacraments of baptism and matrimony, Eucharistic sharing can only be exceptional and in each case according to the stated norms’ (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, *Directory for the Application of Principles and Norms on Ecumenism*, 25 March 1993, 159-160)”.<sup>271</sup>

248. “Marriages involving disparity of cult represent a privileged place for interreligious dialogue in everyday life... They involve special difficulties regarding both the Christian

<sup>271</sup> *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 72.

identity of the family and the religious upbringing of the children... The number of households with married couples with disparity of cult, on the rise in mission territories, and even in countries of long Christian tradition, urgently requires providing a differentiated pastoral care according to various social and cultural contexts. In some countries where freedom of religion does not exist, the Christian spouse is obliged to convert to another religion in order to marry, and, therefore, cannot celebrate a canonical marriage involving disparity of cult or baptize the children. We must therefore reiterate the necessity that the religious freedom of all be respected”.<sup>272</sup> “Attention needs to be given to the persons who enter such marriages, not only in the period before the wedding. Unique challenges face couples and families in which one partner is Catholic and the other is a non-believer. In such cases, bearing witness to the ability of the Gospel to immerse itself in these situations will make possible the upbringing of their children in the Christian faith”.<sup>273</sup>

249. “Particular problems arise when persons in a complex marital situation wish to be baptized. These persons contracted a stable marriage at a time when at least one of them did not know the Christian faith. In such cases, bishops are called to exercise a pastoral discernment which is commensurate with their spiritual good”.<sup>274</sup>

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

250. The Church makes her own the attitude of the Lord Jesus, who offers his boundless love to each person without exception.<sup>275</sup> During the Synod, we discussed the situation of families whose members include persons who experience same-sex attraction, a situation not easy either for parents or for children. We would like before all else to reaffirm that every person, regardless of sexual orientation, ought to be respected in his or her dignity and treated with consideration, while ‘every sign of unjust discrimination’ is to be carefully avoided,<sup>276</sup> particularly any form of aggression and violence. Such families should be given respectful pastoral guidance, so that those who manifest a homosexual orientation can receive the assistance they need to understand and fully carry out God’s will in their lives.<sup>277</sup>

251. In discussing the dignity and mission of the family, the Synod Fathers observed that, “as for proposals to place unions between homosexual persons on the same level as marriage, there are absolutely no grounds for considering homosexual unions to be in any way similar or even remotely analogous to God’s plan for marriage and family”. It is unacceptable “that local Churches should be subjected to pressure in this matter and that international bodies should make financial aid

<sup>275</sup> Cf. Bull *Misericordiae Vultus*, 12: AAS 107 (2015), 407.

<sup>276</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2358; cf. *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 76.

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*

to poor countries dependent on the introduction of laws to establish ‘marriage’ between persons of the same sex”.<sup>278</sup>

252. Single-parent families often result from “the unwillingness of biological mothers or fathers to be part of a family; situations of violence, where one parent is forced to flee with the children; the death of one of the parents; the abandonment of the family by one parent, and other situations. Whatever the cause, single parents must receive encouragement and support from other families in the Christian community, and from the parish’s pastoral outreach. Often these families endure other hardships, such as economic difficulties, uncertain employment prospects, problems with child support and lack of housing”.<sup>279</sup>

#### WHEN DEATH MAKES US FEEL ITS STING

253. At times family life is challenged by the death of a loved one. We cannot fail to offer the light of faith as a support to families going through this experience.<sup>280</sup> To turn our backs on a grieving family would show a lack of mercy, mean the loss of a pastoral opportunity, and close the door to other efforts at evangelization.

254. I can understand the anguish felt by those who have lost a much-loved person, a spouse with whom they have

<sup>278</sup> *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 76; cf. CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH, *Considerations Regarding Proposals to Give Legal Recognition to Unions between Homosexual Persons* (3 June 2003), 4.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>280</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 20.

shared so much. Jesus himself was deeply moved and began to weep at the death of a friend (cf. *Jn* 11:33, 35). And how can we even begin to understand the grief of parents who have lost a child? “It is as if time stops altogether: a chasm opens to engulf both past and future”, and “at times we even go so far as to lay the blame on God. How many people – I can understand them – get angry with God”.<sup>281</sup> “Losing one’s spouse is particularly difficult... From the moment of enduring a loss, some display an ability to concentrate their energies in a greater dedication to their children and grandchildren, finding in this experience of love a renewed sense of mission in raising their children... Those who do not have relatives to spend time with and to receive affection from, should be aided by the Christian community with particular attention and availability, especially if they are poor”.<sup>282</sup>

255. Ordinarily, the grieving process takes a fair amount of time, and when a pastor must accompany that process, he has to adapt to the demands of each of its stages. The entire process is filled with questions: about the reasons why the loved one had to die, about all the things that might have been done, about what a person experiences at the moment of death. With a sincere and patient process of prayer and interior liberation, peace returns. At particular times, we have to help the grieving person to realize that, after the loss of a loved one, we still have a mission to carry out, and that it does us no good to prolong the suffering, as if it were a form of tribute. Our loved ones have no need of our suffering, nor

<sup>281</sup> Catechesis (17 June 2015): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 18 June 2015, p. 8.

<sup>282</sup> *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 19.

does it flatter them that we should ruin our lives. Nor is it the best expression of love to dwell on them and keep bringing up their name, because this is to be dependent on the past instead of continuing to love them now that they are elsewhere. They can no longer be physically present to us, yet for all death's power, "love is strong as death" (*Song* 8:6). Love involves an intuition that can enable us to hear without sounds and to see the unseen. This does not mean imagining our loved ones as they were, but being able to accept them changed as they now are. The risen Jesus, when his friend Mary tried to embrace him, told her not to hold on to him (cf. *Jn* 20:17), in order to lead her to a different kind of encounter.

256. It consoles us to know that those who die do not completely pass away, and faith assures us that the risen Lord will never abandon us. Thus we can "prevent death from poisoning life, from rendering vain our love, from pushing us into the darkest chasm".<sup>283</sup> The Bible tells us that God created us out of love and made us in such a way that our life does not end with death (cf. *Wis* 3:2-3). Saint Paul speaks to us of an encounter with Christ immediately after death: "My desire is to depart and be with Christ" (*Phil* 1:23). With Christ, after death, there awaits us "what God has prepared for those who love him" (*1 Cor* 2:9). The Preface of the Liturgy of the Dead puts it nicely: "Although the certainty of death saddens us, we are consoled by the promise of future immortality. For the life of those who believe in you, Lord, is not ended but changed". Indeed, "our loved ones are not lost in the shades

<sup>283</sup> Catechesis (17 June 2015): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 18 June 2015, p. 8.

of nothingness; hope assures us that they are in the good strong hands of God”.<sup>284</sup>

257. One way of maintaining fellowship with our loved ones is to pray for them.<sup>285</sup> The Bible tells us that “to pray for the dead” is “holy and pious” (2 *Macc* 12:44-45). “Our prayer for them is capable not only of helping them, but also of making their intercession for us effective”.<sup>286</sup> The Book of Revelation portrays the martyrs interceding for those who suffer injustice on earth (cf. *Rev* 6:9-11), in solidarity with this world and its history. Some saints, before dying, consoled their loved ones by promising them that they would be near to help them. Saint Thérèse of Lisieux wished to continue doing good from heaven.<sup>287</sup> Saint Dominic stated that “he would be more helpful after death... more powerful in obtaining graces”.<sup>288</sup> These are truly “bonds of love”,<sup>289</sup> because “the union of the wayfarers with the brethren who sleep in the Lord is in no way interrupted... [but] reinforced by an exchange of spiritual goods”.<sup>290</sup>

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>285</sup> Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 958.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>287</sup> Cf. THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX, *Derniers Entretiens: Le “carnet jaune” de Mère Agnès*, 17 July 1897, in *Œuvres Complètes*, Paris, 1996, 1050. Her Carmelite sisters spoke of a promise made by Saint Thérèse that her departure from this world would be “like a shower of roses” (*ibid.*, 9 June 1897, 1013).

<sup>288</sup> JORDAN OF SAXONY, *Libellus de principiis Ordinis Praedicatorum*, 93: *Monumenta Historica Sancti Patris Nostri Dominici*, XVI, Rome, 1935, p. 69.

<sup>289</sup> Cf. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 957.

<sup>290</sup> SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 49.

258. If we accept death, we can prepare ourselves for it. The way is to grow in our love for those who walk at our side, until that day when “death will be no more, mourning and crying and pain will be no more” (*Rev* 21:4). We will thus prepare ourselves to meet once more our loved ones who have died. Just as Jesus “gave back to his mother” (cf. *Lk* 7:15) her son who had died, so it will be with us. Let us not waste energy by dwelling on the distant past. The better we live on this earth, the greater the happiness we will be able to share with our loved ones in heaven. The more we are able to mature and develop in this world, the more gifts we will be able to bring to the heavenly banquet.