

# AMORIS LAETITIA



Amoris Laetitia Family  
Year 2021 - 2022

## REFLECTION QUESTIONS CHAPTER 9

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- 1. How does your family make time for prayer?  
What are obstacles to your prayer time together?**
- 2. How does our relationship with Christ transform our relationships with those we love?**
- 3. Is there anything more you can do to develop your spiritual life as a family?**

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 NINE

### THE SPIRITUALITY OF MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

313. Charity takes on different hues, depending on the state of life to which we have been called. Several decades ago, in speaking of the lay apostolate, the Second Vatican Council emphasized the spirituality born of family life. The Council stated that lay spirituality “will take its particular character from the circumstances of... married and family life”,<sup>367</sup> and that “family cares should not be foreign” to that spirituality.<sup>368</sup> It is worth pausing to describe certain basic characteristics of this specific spirituality that unfolds in family life and its relationships.

#### A SPIRITUALITY OF SUPERNATURAL COMMUNION

314. We have always spoken of how God dwells in the hearts of those living in his grace. Today we can add that the Trinity is present in the temple of marital communion. Just as God dwells in the praises of his people (cf. *Ps 22:3*), so he dwells deep within the marital love that gives him glory.

315. The Lord’s presence dwells in real and concrete families, with all their daily troubles and struggles, joys and hopes. Living in a family makes it hard for us to feign or lie; we cannot hide behind a mask. If that authenticity is inspired

<sup>367</sup> Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 4.

<sup>368</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

by love, then the Lord reigns there, with his joy and his peace. The spirituality of family love is made up of thousands of small but real gestures. In that variety of gifts and encounters which deepen communion, God has his dwelling place. This mutual concern “brings together the human and the divine”,<sup>369</sup> for it is filled with the love of God. In the end, marital spirituality is a spirituality of the bond, in which divine love dwells.

316. A positive experience of family communion is a true path to daily sanctification and mystical growth, a means for deeper union with God. The fraternal and communal demands of family life are an incentive to growth in openness of heart and thus to an ever fuller encounter with the Lord. The word of God tells us that “the one who hates his brother is in the darkness, and walks in the darkness” (*1 Jn 2:11*); such a person “abides in death” (*1 Jn 3:14*) and “does not know God” (*1 Jn 4:8*). My predecessor Benedict XVI pointed out that “closing our eyes to our neighbour also blinds us to God”,<sup>370</sup> and that, in the end, love is the only light which can “constantly illuminate a world grown dim”.<sup>371</sup> If only we “love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us” (*1 Jn 4:12*). Since “the human person has an inherent social dimension”,<sup>372</sup> and “the first and basic expression of that social dimension of the person is the married couple and the

<sup>369</sup> SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World *Gaudium et Spes*, 49.

<sup>370</sup> Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est* (25 December 2015), 16: AAS 98 (2006), 230.

<sup>371</sup> *Ibid.*, 39: AAS 98 (2006), 250.

<sup>372</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici* (30 December 1988), 40: AAS 81 (1989), 468.

family”,<sup>373</sup> spirituality becomes incarnate in the communion of the family. Hence, those who have deep spiritual aspirations should not feel that the family detracts from their growth in the life of the Spirit, but rather see it as a path which the Lord is using to lead them to the heights of mystical union.

#### GATHERED IN PRAYER IN THE LIGHT OF EASTER

317. If a family is centred on Christ, he will unify and illumine its entire life. Moments of pain and difficulty will be experienced in union with the Lord’s cross, and his closeness will make it possible to surmount them. In the darkest hours of a family’s life, union with Jesus in his abandonment can help avoid a breakup. Gradually, “with the grace of the Holy Spirit, [the spouses] grow in holiness through married life, also by sharing in the mystery of Christ’s cross, which transforms difficulties and sufferings into an offering of love”.<sup>374</sup> Moreover, moments of joy, relaxation, celebration, and even sexuality can be experienced as a sharing in the full life of the resurrection. Married couples shape with different daily gestures a “God-enlightened space in which to experience the hidden presence of the risen Lord”.<sup>375</sup>

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>374</sup> *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 87.

<sup>375</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (25 March 1996), 42: AAS 88 (1996), 416.

318. Family prayer is a special way of expressing and strengthening this paschal faith.<sup>376</sup> A few minutes can be found each day to come together before the living God, to tell him our worries, to ask for the needs of our family, to pray for someone experiencing difficulty, to ask for help in showing love, to give thanks for life and for its blessings, and to ask Our Lady to protect us beneath her maternal mantle. With a few simple words, this moment of prayer can do immense good for our families. The various expressions of popular piety are a treasure of spirituality for many families. The family's communal journey of prayer culminates by sharing together in the Eucharist, especially in the context of the Sunday rest. Jesus knocks on the door of families, to share with them the Eucharistic supper (cf. *Rev* 3:20). There, spouses can always seal anew the paschal covenant which united them and which ought to reflect the covenant which God sealed with mankind in the cross.<sup>377</sup> The Eucharist is the sacrament of the new covenant, where Christ's redemptive work is carried out (cf. *Lk* 22:20). The close bond between married life and the Eucharist thus becomes all the more clear.<sup>378</sup> For the food of the Eucharist offers the spouses the strength and incentive needed to live the marriage covenant each day as a "domestic church".<sup>379</sup>

<sup>376</sup> Cf. *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 87.

<sup>377</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), 57: AAS 74 (1982), 150.

<sup>378</sup> Nor should we forget that God's covenant with his people is expressed as an espousal (cf. *Ez* 16:8, 60; *Is* 62:5; *Hos* 2:21-22), and that the new covenant is also presented as a betrothal (cf. *Rev* 19:7; 21:2; *Eph* 5:25).

<sup>379</sup> SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 11.

319. Marriage is also the experience of belonging completely to another person. Spouses accept the challenge and aspiration of supporting one another, growing old together, and in this way reflecting God's own faithfulness. This firm decision, which shapes a style of life, is an "interior requirement of the covenant of conjugal love",<sup>380</sup> since "a person who cannot choose to love for ever can hardly love for even a single day".<sup>381</sup> At the same time, such fidelity would be spiritually meaningless were it simply a matter of following a law with obedient resignation. Rather, it is a matter of the heart, into which God alone sees (cf. *Mt* 5:28). Every morning, on rising, we reaffirm before God our decision to be faithful, come what may in the course of the day. And all of us, before going to sleep, hope to wake up and continue this adventure, trusting in the Lord's help. In this way, each spouse is for the other a sign and instrument of the closeness of the Lord, who never abandons us: "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (*Mt* 28:20).

320. There comes a point where a couple's love attains the height of its freedom and becomes the basis of a healthy autonomy. This happens when each spouse realizes that the other is not his or her own, but has a much more important master, the one Lord. No one but God can presume to take

<sup>380</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), 11: AAS 74 (1982), 93.

<sup>381</sup> ID., *Homily at Mass with Families*, Cordoba, Argentina (8 April 1987), 4: *Insegnamenti* X/1 (1987), 1161-1162.

over the deepest and most personal core of the loved one; he alone can be the ultimate centre of their life. At the same time, the principle of spiritual realism requires that one spouse not presume that the other can completely satisfy his or her needs. The spiritual journey of each – as Dietrich Bonhoeffer nicely put it – needs to help them to a certain “disillusionment” with regard to the other,<sup>382</sup> to stop expecting from that person something which is proper to the love of God alone. This demands an interior divestment. The space which each of the spouses makes exclusively for their personal relationship with God not only helps heal the hurts of life in common, but also enables the spouses to find in the love of God the deepest source of meaning in their own lives. Each day we have to invoke the help of the Holy Spirit to make this interior freedom possible.

#### A SPIRITUALITY OF CARE, CONSOLATION AND INCENTIVE

321. “Christian couples are, for each other, for their children and for their relatives, cooperators of grace and witnesses of the faith”.<sup>383</sup> God calls them to bestow life and to care for life. For this reason the family “has always been the nearest ‘hospital’”.<sup>384</sup> So let us care for one another, guide and encourage one another, and experience this as a part of our family spirituality. Life as a couple is a daily sharing in God’s

<sup>382</sup> Cf. *Gemeinsames Leben*, Munich, 1973, p. 18. English: *Life Together*, New York, 1954, p. 27.

<sup>383</sup> SECOND VATICAN ECUMENICAL COUNCIL, Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 11.

<sup>384</sup> Catechesis (10 June 2015): *L’Osservatore Romano*, 11 June 2015, p. 8.

creative work, and each person is for the other a constant challenge from the Holy Spirit. God's love is proclaimed "through the living and concrete word whereby a man and the woman express their conjugal love".<sup>385</sup> The two are thus mutual reflections of that divine love which comforts with a word, a look, a helping hand, a caress, an embrace. For this reason "to want to form a family is to resolve to be a part of God's dream, to choose to dream with him, to want to build with him, to join him in this saga of building a world where no one will feel alone".<sup>386</sup>

322. All family life is a "shepherding" in mercy. Each of us, by our love and care, leaves a mark on the life of others; with Paul, we can say: "You are our letter of recommendation, written on your hearts... not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God" (2 *Cor* 3:2-3). Each of us is a "fisher of men" (*Lk* 5:10) who in Jesus' name "casts the nets" (cf. *Lk* 5:5) to others, or a farmer who tills the fresh soil of those whom he or she loves, seeking to bring out the best in them. Marital fruitfulness involves helping others, for "to love anybody is to expect from him something which can neither be defined nor foreseen; it is at the same time in some way to make it possible for him to fulfil this expectation".<sup>387</sup> This is itself a way to

<sup>385</sup> JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), 12: AAS 74 (1982), 93.

<sup>386</sup> *Address at the Prayer Vigil of the Festival of Families*, Philadelphia (26 September 2015): *L'Osservatore Romano*, 28-29 September 2015, p. 6.

<sup>387</sup> GABRIEL MARCEL, *Homo Viator: prolégomènes à une métaphysique de l'espérance*, Paris, 1944, p. 66. English: *Homo Viator. An Introduction to a Metaphysics of Hope*, London, 1951, p. 49.

worship God, who has sown so much good in others in the hope that we will help make it grow.

323. It is a profound spiritual experience to contemplate our loved ones with the eyes of God and to see Christ in them. This demands a freedom and openness which enable us to appreciate their dignity. We can be fully present to others only by giving fully of ourselves and forgetting all else. Our loved ones merit our complete attention. Jesus is our model in this, for whenever people approached to speak with him, he would meet their gaze, directly and lovingly (cf. *Mk* 10:21). No one felt overlooked in his presence, since his words and gestures conveyed the question “What do you want me to do for you?” (*Mk* 10:51). This is what we experience in the daily life of the family. We are constantly reminded that each of those who live with us merits complete attention, since he or she possesses infinite dignity as an object of the Father’s immense love. This gives rise to a tenderness which can “stir in the other the joy of being loved. Tenderness is expressed in a particular way by exercising loving care in treating the limitations of the other, especially when they are evident”.<sup>388</sup>

324. Led by the Spirit, the family circle is not only open to life by generating it within itself, but also by going forth and spreading life by caring for others and seeking their happiness. This openness finds particular expression in hospitality,<sup>389</sup> which the word of God eloquently encourages: “Do not

<sup>388</sup> *Relatio Finalis* 2015, 88.

<sup>389</sup> Cf. JOHN PAUL II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (22 November 1981), 44: AAS 74 (1982), 136.

neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (*Heb* 13:2). When a family is welcoming and reaches out to others, especially the poor and the neglected, it is “a symbol, witness and participant in the Church’s motherhood”.<sup>390</sup> Social love, as a reflection of the Trinity, is what truly unifies the spiritual meaning of the family and its mission to others, for it makes present the kerygma in all its communal imperatives. The family lives its spirituality precisely by being at one and the same time a domestic church and a vital cell for transforming the world.<sup>391</sup>

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325. The teaching of the Master (cf. *Mt* 22:30) and Saint Paul (cf. *I Cor* 7:29-31) on marriage is set – and not by chance – in the context of the ultimate and definitive dimension of our human existence. We urgently need to rediscover the richness of this teaching. By heeding it, married couples will come to see the deeper meaning of their journey through life. As this Exhortation has often noted, no family drops down from heaven perfectly formed; families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love. This is a never-ending vocation born of the full communion of the Trinity, the profound unity between Christ and his Church, the loving community which is the Holy Family of Nazareth, and the pure fraternity existing among the saints of heaven. Our contemplation of the fulfilment which we have yet to attain also allows us to

<sup>390</sup> *Ibid.*, 49: AAS 74 (1982), 141.

<sup>391</sup> For the social aspects of the family, cf. PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 248-254.

see in proper perspective the historical journey which we make as families, and in this way to stop demanding of our interpersonal relationships a perfection, a purity of intentions and a consistency which we will only encounter in the Kingdom to come. It also keeps us from judging harshly those who live in situations of frailty. All of us are called to keep striving towards something greater than ourselves and our families, and every family must feel this constant impulse. Let us make this journey as families; let us keep walking together. What we have been promised is greater than we can imagine. May we never lose heart because of our limitations, or ever stop seeking that fullness of love and communion which God holds out before us.

## PRAYER TO THE HOLY FAMILY

*Jesus, Mary and Joseph,  
in you we contemplate  
the splendour of true love;  
to you we turn with trust.*

*Holy Family of Nazareth,  
grant that our families too  
may be places of communion and prayer,  
authentic schools of the Gospel  
and small domestic churches.*

*Holy Family of Nazareth,  
may families never again experience  
violence, rejection and division;  
may all who have been hurt or scandalized  
find ready comfort and healing.*

*Holy Family of Nazareth,  
make us once more mindful  
of the sacredness and inviolability of the family,  
and its beauty in God's plan.*

*Jesus, Mary and Joseph,  
Graciously hear our prayer.*

*Amen.*

Given in Rome, at Saint Peter's, during the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, on 19 March, the Solemnity of Saint Joseph, in the year 2016, the fourth of my Pontificate.

*Franciscus*