Amoris Laetitia: The Joy of Love In The Family

By Most Reverend Prakash Mallavarapu,

Archbishop of Visakhapatnam -
This year, on March 19th, the feast of St. Joseph, our beloved Holy Father, Pope Francis, gave the post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, “Amoris Laetitia,” the “Joy of Love.” Being the eve of Palm Sunday and the commencement of the Holy Week, this news did not get full attention. Moreover, the topic of the washing of the feet was hotly discussed topic as something new was initiated, namely, those that are chosen for commemorating the washing of the feet during the Mass of the Lord’s Supper may be from different sections of the People of God.

As St. Joseph who lived his call in silence to be the foster father of Jesus and husband of Mary, this important document which is the fruit of two Synods of Bishops has been silently there for more than two months! But, this rich document that speaks the mind and heart of the Church about “marriage and family” should not end up as one more document of the Church on the book shelf. The Church is concerned about marriage and family as an essential part of her mission in the world. Family is the cradle of life. Family is a home to every human being, even if every family is not a perfect and happy home.

“It is my hope that,” the Holy Father writes, “in reading this text, all will feel called to love and cherish family life, for families are not a problem; they are first and foremost an opportunity” (AL, n.7). This means, family and marriage should not to be seen as problems because there are many problems and questions related to marriage and family. Perhaps, the variety of challenges and problems family life is facing today undermine the important contribution family makes.

Role of The Family
Family plays a crucial role in the growth and development of the individual man and woman in the human family of the world. This precisely is also the reason why the Church feels urged to examine “the situation (current) of the families in today’s world and to see how Church with her pastoral care can be at the service of the married couples and their families, as a help and encouragement to families in their daily commitment and challenges” (AL, 5). A world-wide consultation and extensive research has gone into the preparation and conducting of the two Synods on Family, held in 2015 and 2016 in the Vatican. Amoris Latitia, the Joy of Love, the Apostolic Exhortation, brings to the entire Church and the whole humanity the reflections of the Church on marriage and family. There are no ready-made solutions to all the questions and challenges coming from across the globe but certain directions and guidelines can be given for helping the married couples and families.

One of the features of Amoris Latitia, the Apostolic Exhortation, is the concern the Holy Father expresses on behalf of the Church. The Church is herself a “family of families.” Church sees every family as the domestic Church and as such, the well being of the families will be the well being of the Church. Therefore, the Church is not only a teacher of the doctrine of the Church on marriage and family but essentially is also like an accompanying mother to the married couples and families. Faced with the challenges due to rapid changes in the outlook and understanding of marriage and family among the people in the modern society, and the pressure brought by different trends in the consumerist and hedonist among the modern generation of people, starting a family life with the celebration of the sacrament of matrimony appears to have become a challenge. In these difficult situations, the Church is reminding herself of her mission of proclaiming the gospel of life, right values and perspectives one should have regarding marriage and family life.

**Message for Married Couples**

The Church is obliged to continue to be at the service of the world without succumbing to the ways of the world. Therefore, from the stage of preparation for marriage, Church has to
positively play her role in helping the married couples to sustain themselves in their commitments to marriage and family life. The pastors are called upon to be sensitive, sympathetic and empathetic towards the couples who are failing to be faithful to marriage vows. They should accompany them in their weaknesses and in their struggles to persevere in their faithfulness. The married couples and the Church should continuously strive for promoting a meaningful, happy and fulfilling married life in the family.

The document is rather long, divided into nine chapters altogether but it is easy to read and understand the contents because the whole document is more pastoral in its approach and very much grounded in the real world of everyday life. The fundamental doctrinal teachings of the Church on married and family are not in any way compromised or changed. Therefore, chapters, one, three, four, and five are dealing with the foundations in scripture and tradition on marriage. The emphasis is on how the good news of Jesus Christ and the teachings contained in other parts of the New Testament can help the modern generation to find strength and direction to live fully the married and family life.

**Christian Understand of Love**

Christians who are the followers of the “Way of Jesus Christ” understand life, from birth to death, in Jesus Christ. So, marriage and family life also have to draw the fundamentals of marriage and family from Jesus Christ and the Church. That is why the document seeks help and inspiration in Jesus Christ and the Holy Scriptures in order to understand marriage and family life. Families should be guided by values of the gospel, especially, Christian understanding of love! The Holy Father says, “All that has been said so far (in the Exhortation) would be insufficient to express the Gospel of marriage and the family, were we not also to *speak of love*. For we cannot encourage a path of fidelity and mutual self-giving without encouraging the growth, strengthening and deepening of conjugal love” (AL 89). But, the word love, very commonly used, is often misused” (AL 89).
Chapter two of the Exhortation dwells at length on the present day challenges that were extensively discussed and deliberated in both the Synods, conveying thereby the message that the Church is fully aware of the real difficulties, problems and confusions that family life is facing today. In the background of the teachings of the Church on one side and the real challenges of the present day culture on the other, one important question is being raised with a great concern: “How to stand in support of the married couples and families to help them to bravely face the challenges while being faithful to the commitments and obligations of marriage and family?”

In an effort to propose some concrete ways of providing support to the families, in chapters six, seven, and eight of the Exhortation the Holy Father indicates some directions and suggests guidelines to the married couples as well as the pastors who have the pastoral responsibility of extending assistance to the married life and family life. The whole dynamic of marriage and family life is not just in the hands two persons, husband and wife. The children, the youth and the elderly in the given family, and other members related to the family play their respective roles. Marriage and family life becomes a matter coping with a huge bundle of relationships and have to deal with a whole range of needs of different age groups in the family. The married couple alone cannot easily cope with the complex reality of marriage and family. Therefore, the Church through a committed pastoral care has to be there to accompany!

**Pope Calls on Church to Help Families**

In presenting the Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Pope Francis, is calling on the Church to creatively be of help to the families. There is certain urgency in the appeal the Holy Father is making because there is the imminent danger of a gradual destruction of the age-old and divinely provided institution of marriage and family. *Here, the important point to be considered is how the local church, every diocese and every parish, should think and plan as to how married couples and families should be helped to sustain*
themselves as “domestic churches.” We cannot leave the matter of determining the future of family life wholly in hands of the secular forces governed and controlled by the values of the market economy of the globalized world. The existential realities cannot be denied but there should be a strong mind to stand against the currents. That is where the proposal of the concluding chapter assumes great importance; there is the need of promoting “Spirituality of Marriage and Family life.” “No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed; families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love” (AL 326). The Exhortation ends with a prayer to the Holy Family, a model of spirituality of marriage and 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.

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