

Summary of the apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love) on love in the family as provided from the Vatican on April 8, 2016.

## **Chapter two: “The experiences and challenges of families” (31-57)**

Building on the biblical base in the second chapter the Pope considers the current situation of families. While keeping “firmly grounded in [the] reality” of family experiences, he also draws heavily on the final reports of the two Synods. Families face many challenges, from migration to the ideological denial of differences between the sexes (“ideology of gender”); from the culture of the provisional to the anti-birth mentality and the impact of biotechnology in the field of procreation; from the lack of housing and work to pornography and abuse of minors; from inattention to persons with disabilities, to lack of respect for the elderly; from the legal dismantling of the family, to violence against women. The Pope insists on concreteness, which is a key concept in the Exhortation. And it is concreteness, realism and daily life that make up the substantial difference between acceptable “theories” of interpretation of reality and arbitrary “ideologies”.

Citing *Familiaris Consortio*, Francis states that “we do well to focus on concrete realities, since ‘the call and the demands of the Spirit resound in the events of history’, and through these ‘the Church can also be guided to a more profound understanding of the inexhaustible mystery of marriage and the family’”. Conversely, if we fail to listen to reality, we cannot understand the needs of the present or the movements of the Spirit. The Pope notes that rampant individualism makes it difficult today for a person to give oneself generously to another. Here is an interesting picture of the situation: “The fear of loneliness and the desire for stability and fidelity exist side by side with a growing fear of entrapment in a relationship that could hamper the achievement of one’s personal goals”.

The humility of realism helps us to avoid presenting “a far too abstract and almost artificial theological ideal of marriage, far removed from the concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families”. Idealism does not allow marriage to be understood for what it is, that is, a “dynamic path to personal development and fulfilment”. It is unrealistic to think that families can sustain themselves “simply by stressing doctrinal, bioethical and moral issues, without encouraging openness to grace”. Calling for a certain “self-criticism” of approaches that are inadequate for the experience of marriage and the family, the Pope stresses the need to make room for the formation of the conscience of the faithful: “We have been called to form consciences, not to replace them”. Jesus proposed a demanding ideal but “never failed to show compassion and closeness to the frailty of individuals like the Samaritan woman or the woman caught in adultery”.