

The following is a 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. Over the coming weeks we continue to present the summary. Today we begin with the Introduction and Chapter One. Within the entire document our Holy Father frequently cites final reports, documents and teachings of his predecessors, and his own numerous catechesis on the family. As in previous magisterial documents, the Pope also makes use of the contributions of various Episcopal Conferences around the world (Kenya, Australia, Argentina...) and cites significant figures such as Martin Luther King and Erich Fromm. The Pope even quotes the film *Babette's Feast* to illustrate the concept of gratuity.

#### Introduction (1-7)

The Apostolic Exhortation's 325 paragraphs are distributed over nine chapters. The seven introductory paragraphs plainly set out the complexity of a topic in urgent need of thorough study. The interventions of the Synod Fathers make up [form] a "multifaceted gem" a precious polyhedron, whose value must be preserved. But the Pope cautions that "not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium." Indeed, for some questions, "each country or region ... can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs. For 'cultures are in fact quite diverse and every general principle ... needs to be inculturated, if it is to be respected and applied.'" This principle of inculturation applies to how problems are formulated and addressed and, apart from the dogmatic issues that have been well defined by the Church's magisterium, none of this approach can be "globalized." At the end of the 2015 Synod, the Pope said very clearly: "What seems normal for a bishop on one continent, is considered strange and almost scandalous – almost! – for a bishop from another; what is considered a violation of a right in one society is an evident and inviolable rule in another; what for some is freedom of conscience is for others simply confusion." The Pope clearly states that we need above all to avoid a sterile juxtaposition of demands for change and the general application of abstract norms. He writes: "The debates carried on in the media, in certain publications and even among the Church's ministers, range from an immoderate desire for total change without sufficient reflection or grounding, to an attitude that would solve everything by applying general rules or deriving undue conclusions from particular theological considerations."

#### **Chapter One: "In the light of the Word" (8-30)**

The Pope begins his reflections with the Holy Scriptures, which unfolds as a meditation on Psalm 128 (which appears in the Jewish wedding liturgy as well as that of Christian marriages). The Bible "is full of families, births, love stories and family crises." This impels us to meditate on how the family is not an abstract ideal but rather like a practical "trade," which is carried out with tenderness, but which has also been confronted with sin from the beginning, when the relationship of love turned into domination. Hence, the Word of God "is not a series of abstract ideas but rather a source of comfort and companionship for every family that experiences difficulties or suffering. For it shows them the goal of their journey...".