

The Year of the Family 2021-2022

A Family Spirituality Book based on the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis: *Amoris Laetitia*



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On the Cover
The Holy Family
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Journal Notes

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Introduction	4
Opening Prayer	5
Part I: God Has Something to Say about Love	6
Part II: The Experience of Family Love	11
Part III: The Vocation of the Family	16
Part IV: Marital Love	21
Part V: Fruitful Love	26
Part VI: Pastoral Love	30
Part VII: Spirituality of the Family	34
Holiness Runs in the Family: Saints for the Family	38
Closing Prayer to the Holy Family	41
Journal Notes	42

Introduction



XV Synod of Bishops. Photo,
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In October of 2014 and 2015 bishops representing every part of the world gathered in Rome with Pope Francis for a Synod on the Family. A Synod is an assembly of bishops chosen to represent their fellow bishops who gather around the Bishop of Rome, the Pope, to discuss, debate and give advice to the Holy Father on some pastoral matter concerning the universal Church. In 2014 the topic of discussion was on the pastoral challenges facing the family. In 2015 the topic was on the vocation and mission of the family in the Church and in the contemporary world.

At the conclusion of every Synod of Bishops the Pope writes an Apostolic Exhortation summarizing the final teaching of the Synod and exhorting the faithful to advance the mission of the Church with respect to the topic of the Exhortation. It is an official document of the Holy Father to the faithful providing direction on how to address the particular pastoral, moral and spiritual issue at hand, in this case, on the family.

The Apostolic Exhortation written by Pope Francis at the conclusion of the Synod of Bishops on the Family is titled *Amoris Laetitia*, or *The Joy of Love*. It addresses love in the family.

This booklet is meant to be a prayer companion for married couples, engaged couples, or anyone who wishes to reflect more deeply about love in the family and to pray for growth in that love in the Church and in the world. Each part begins with a psalm for prayer and a brief quote from *Amoris Laetitia* to introduce the section. These are followed by a meditation, which briefly summarizes for your reflection a chapter from *Amoris*. Each part then finishes with a prayer from Pope Francis and questions for further reflection. Finally, the booklet ends with a sample of saints who were of the same family who serve as patrons for all those seeking to grow in family love.

Closing Prayer to the Holy Family by Pope Francis

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,
may the Synod of Bishops
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.



The Holy Family. Public Domain.

Saints Francisco and Jacinta Marto

Brother and Sister

Feast Day: February 20



Prayer to Saints Francisco and Jacinta

Saints Jacinta and Francisco Marto, Dear Shepard children of Fatima, you were chosen by heaven to see our Blessed Mother and to deliver her message of conversion to a world that had strayed far from God.

You who suffered so greatly and died from the Spanish flu, the pandemic of your time, pray for us who suffer in the pandemic of our times, that God have mercy upon us.

Pray for the children of the world.

Pray for our protection and an end to what plagues us physically, mentally and spiritually.

Pray for our world, our countries, the church, and for the most vulnerable people who are suffering and in need of healing.

Little shepherds of Fatima, help us to come to the refuge of Mary's immaculate heart, so to receive the graces we need at this time, and to come to the beauty of the life that is to come.

We trust, as you did, in the words of our blessed mother who taught you to, "Pray the rosary everyday in honor of our lady of the rosary, because only she can help you."

Amen.

**Opening Prayer For Families
Synod on the Family**

Heavenly Father,
We come before You to praise You
and to thank You for the great gift of the family.

We pray to You for all families
consecrated by the Sacrament of Matrimony.
May they rediscover each day
the grace they have received,
and as small domestic Churches,
may they know how to witness to Your presence
and to the love with which Christ loves the Church.

We pray to You for all families faced with difficulty and suffering
caused by illness or circumstances of which only You know.
Sustain them and make them aware
of the path to holiness upon which You call them,
so that they might experience Your infinite mercy
and find new ways to grow in love.

We pray to You for children and young people:
may they encounter You and respond joyfully
to the vocation You have in mind for them;
We pray for parents and grandparents: may they be aware
that they are signs of the fatherhood and motherhood of God
in caring for the children who, in body and spirit, You entrust to
them; and for the experience of fraternity
that the family can give to the world

Lord, grant that each family
might live their specific vocation to holiness in the Church
as a call to become missionary disciples,
in the service of life and peace,
in communion with our priests, religious,
and all vocations in the Church.

Amen.

Part I: God Has Something to Say about Love

Opening Prayer:

Psalm 128

*Blessed is every one who fears the LORD,
who walks in his ways!
You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands;
you shall be happy, and it shall be well with you.*

*Your wife will be like a fruitful vine
within your house;
your children will be like olive shoots
around your table.
Lo, thus shall the man be blessed
who fears the LORD.*

*The LORD bless you from Zion!
May you see the prosperity of
Jerusalem
all the days of your life!
May you see your children's children!
Peace be upon Israel!*



Adam and Eve in Eden. Stained glass window in the William Morris Museum in London. Photo by Lawrence Lew, O.P. Flickr

Amoris Laetitia, #8 by Pope Francis:

The Bible is full of families, births, love stories and family crises. This is true from its very first page, with the appearance of Adam and Eve's family with all its burden of violence but also its enduring strength (cf. Gen 4) to its very last page, where we behold the wedding feast of the Bride and the Lamb (Rev 21:2, 9). Jesus' description of the two houses, one built on rock and the other on sand (cf. Mt 7:24-27), symbolizes any number of family situations shaped by the exercise of their members' freedom, for, as the poet says, "every home is a lampstand".

Blesseds Luigi and Maria Quattrocchi
Feast Day: November 25

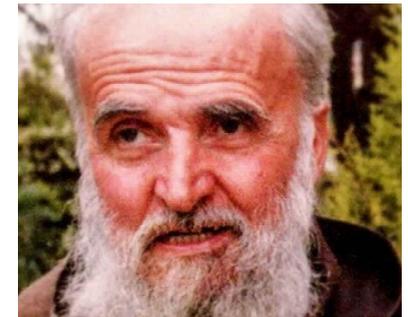


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**Saint Gianna Berreta Molla and
Servant of God Enrico Berreta**
Sister and Brother
Feast Day of St. Gianna: April 28



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Prayer of St. Gianna

Jesus, I promise You to submit myself to all that You permit to befall me, make me only know Your will.
My most sweet Jesus, infinitely merciful God,
most tender Father of souls,
and in a particular way of the most weak, most miserable, most infirm which You carry with special tenderness between Your divine arms, I come to You to ask You, through the love and merits of Your Sacred Heart,
the grace to comprehend and to do always Your holy will,
the grace to confide in You,
the grace to rest securely through time and eternity in Your loving divine arms. Amen.

Holiness Runs in the Family: Saints for the Family

Saints Louis & Zélie Martin

Parents of St. Therese of Lisieux
Feast Day: July 12

Saints Louis and Zélie Martin,
after having had the desire for religious
life,
you heard the Lord's call to the vocation
of marriage.
You are the "parents without equal"
of whom your daughter Saint Thérèse of
the Child Jesus speaks;
the fortunate parents of Léonie,
the Servant of God, Sister Françoise-Thérèse;
of Marie, Pauline, and Céline,
transplanted to Mount Carmel;
and of the four children
taken from your affection in their youth:
Hélène, Joseph, Jean-Baptiste, and Mélanie-Thérèse.
You gave all glory to God
through your humble and patient work,
your commitment to the poor,
and your family life,
where reigned the happiness
of loving and being loved.
You lived your daily life concretely
through the joys and sorrows of your existence.
You love us as your own children,
with the heart of a father and the heart of a mother,
because you are the friends of God.
Listen to our prayer and our request
(state the request . . .)
and intercede for us with God the Father,
through Jesus Christ our Lord,
in the grace of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.



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Meditation

The Holy Bible is truly a Divine Drama. It is the drama of God's passionate love and our struggle to come to terms with that love, with all of the twists and turns of plot and character development present in any drama. It is the true drama of divine and human love, the loss of that love and the redemption of that love by God who will not, indeed cannot, surrender to loss. From the opening pages to the last, the image provided in the Scriptures for understanding this drama is marriage.

The Christian couple must look to the Bible to understand its own love story. As in the Bible so in the personal story of every couple is found the Divine Drama of love, loss, crisis, endurance and redemption. What do we learn about love from the Scriptures?

In the beginning... We are familiar with those opening lines from Genesis. It is the account of God's creative love. God's inner life is the perfect, eternal love of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God is love and communion. That love bursts forth from within himself in creative speech and action as he brings into being all things, from nothing. The high point of creation is the human person. He makes us "in his image", male and female. As God is creative so are we. As God's life is one of love, so are we called to experience the same.

The human person images God in the creative love of marriage, male and female. The marriage of a man and a woman is an icon of God. When contemplating an icon we are meant to see the holiness of the Kingdom of God emerge from the image and through it to be drawn into the Kingdom. Marriage is meant to be the same. As God brings forth new life as the ultimate sign of his love, so the love of marriage is fully experienced when it is open to life. As the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are turned toward each other in an eternal gaze of love, so the marriage of male and female is a face-to-face encounter of two persons who turn toward each other in love. Through this love couples experience something of the inner life of God in their marriage and in having children. Like God's love, marriage is so filled with creative power

that it cannot remain within itself but is capable of bursting forth into a new life, a new person.

We know from following the rest of Genesis that the drama of God's creative love involves the serious plot twist of the man and woman rejecting God's love through the original sin. The experience of the original sin is in all of us. Sin turns love into lust and the gift of self into the taking of the other for one's own pleasure. As we would and should recoil in shock if someone were to damage an icon, so we recoil at a relationship that is not an icon of the love of God.

Throughout the Scriptures we encounter the numerous recollections of the couples, families, men and women, striving for holiness, falling short, seeking mercy and rising again through that Divine Mercy. Jesus teaches us in the Gospel that, through his grace, marriage is not only capable of reflecting the creative love of God but now it also reflects the redemptive love of God. Through Christ Christian marriage of a man and a woman is a sacrament. Christian marriage is also an experience of sacrificial and eucharistic love. This refers to love that remains true throughout the process of two broken people becoming whole again over a life-time together. The experiences of the good times and bad, the sicknesses and the health are the same as they were in the drama contained in the Bible. Marriage and family love are not all roses; there is suffering, pain and sadness. But those become sacrificial in the sacrament and help in the redemption of the family members and of the whole world. As the Eucharist contains Christ in the reality of his sacrificial love, so Christian marriage contains the reality of human love that is not yet perfect but is in process to become so, which requires much sacrificial love. In this way, the family is a "domestic church." Faith, hope and love are lived within the context of every-day life and its plot twists.

Receiving the Body and Blood of Christ in the Eucharist keeps us in communion with God, and we are empowered to go and live our daily life in the same sacrificial, loving and merciful way that Christ did. So too the family lives daily life as a mini-church learning and growing, struggling and recovering in order to bring out the best in one another, to become saints. The Holy Family itself experienced the various crises of life from unexpected pregnancy to traumatic escapes from Herod, to emigration, to the toil of daily work. In all of

Spiritual Exercises

1. Pope Francis speaks of a "style of life" that comes with the commitment to marriage. Do you notice a particular style of life that has shaped you since becoming married or thinking of marriage?
2. What do you think are the "wealth and riches" of marriage?
3. Reflect on what Pope Francis says about praising the Lord.

First and foremost, [Jesus] praises [God] for who He is: "Father, Lord of heaven and earth". Jesus rejoices in his spirit because he knows and feels that his Father is the God of the Universe, and vice versa, the Lord of all that exists is the Father, "My Father". Praise springs from this experience of feeling that he is "Son of the Most High". Jesus feels he is Son of the Most High.

And then Jesus praises the Father for favouring the little ones. It is what he himself experiences, preaching in the villages: the "learned" and the "wise" remain suspicious and closed; they make calculations; while the "little ones" open themselves and welcome his message. This can only be the will of the Father, and Jesus rejoices in this. We too must rejoice and praise God because humble and simple people welcome the Gospel. When I see these simple people, these humble people who go on pilgrimages, who go to pray, who sing, who praise, people who perhaps lack many things but whose humility leads them to praise God. In the future of the world and in the hopes of the Church there are always the "little ones": those who do not consider themselves better than others, who are aware of their own limitations and their sins, who do not want to lord it over others, who, in God the Father, recognize that we are all brothers and sisters.

*Therefore, in that moment of apparent failure, where everything is dark, Jesus prays, praising the Father. And his prayer also leads us, readers of the Gospel, to judge our personal defeats in a different way, to judge differently the situations in which we do not see clearly the presence and action of God, when it seems that evil prevails and there is no way to stop it. Jesus, who highly recommended the prayer of asking, at the very moment when he would have had reason to ask the Father for explanations, instead begins to praise him. It seems to be a contradiction, but therein lies the truth. **For more see Pope Francis' General Audience on January 13, 2021***

Prayer to Jesus on the Cross by Pope Francis

Lord Jesus, help us to see in your Cross all the crosses of the world:
the cross of people hungry for bread and for love;
the cross of people alone and abandoned even by their children and kin;
the cross of people thirsty for justice and for peace;
the cross of people who lack the comfort of faith;
the cross of the elderly who struggle under the weight of years and of loneliness;
the cross of migrants who find doors closed in fear and hearts armoured by political calculations;
the cross of little ones, wounded in their innocence and their purity;
the cross of humanity that wanders in the darkness of uncertainty and in the obscurity of temporary culture;
the cross of families split by betrayal, by the seductions of the evil one or by homicidal levity and selfishness;
the cross of consecrated people who tirelessly seek to bring your light into the world and feel rejected, derided and humiliated;
the cross of consecrated people who, along the way, have forgotten their first love;
the cross of your children who, while believing in you and seeking to live according to your word, find themselves marginalized and rejected even by their families and their peers;
the cross of our weaknesses, of our hypocrisy, of our betrayals, of our sins and of our many broken promises;
the cross of your Church that, faithful to your Gospel, struggles to spread your love even among the baptized themselves;
the cross of the Church, your Bride, that feels constantly assailed from within and without;
the cross of our common home that is gravely withering before our selfish eyes, blinded by greed and by power.

Lord Jesus, revive in us the hope of resurrection and of your definitive victory over all evil and all death. Amen!

it they remained true to each other and to the faith handed on by the holy prophets and teachers of Israel. Through that faith they found their hope to trust in divine providence. Every Christian family should look to Jesus, Mary and Joseph as their partners in the noble and challenging task of family love.

Turning to Our Lady's Immaculate Heart we find a treasury of very human experiences of the realities of earthly life but also the indestructible power of trusting in the creative love of God. In that heart are all of the memories of the drama of earthly life. Her Immaculate Heart awaits our approach to her as Mother who comforts, teaches and mentors. In Mary's heart is truly found the joy of love.

Prayer to Our Lady by Pope Francis

O Mary,
you always shine on our path
as a sign of salvation and of hope.
We entrust ourselves to you, Health of the Sick,
who at the cross took part in Jesus' pain, keeping your faith firm.
You, Salvation of the Roman People,
know what we need,
and we are sure you will provide
so that, as in Cana of Galilee,
we may return to joy and to feasting
after this time of trial.
Help us, Mother of Divine Love,
to conform to the will of the Father
and to do as we are told by Jesus,
who has taken upon himself our sufferings
and carried our sorrows
to lead us, through the cross,
to the joy of the resurrection. Amen.

Under your protection, we seek refuge, Holy Mother of God. Do not disdain the entreaties of we who are in trial, but deliver us from every danger, O glorious and blessed Virgin. Amen.



Immaculate Heart of Mary.
Stained glass detail from St
Casimir's parish in Baltimore,
MD. Photo by Lawrence Lew,
O.P. Flickr

Spiritual Exercises

1. Psalm 128 says that everyone who fears the Lord will be blessed. Consider the Fear of the Lord from Pope Francis:

The gift of fear of the Lord, which we are speaking about today, concludes the series of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. It does not mean being afraid of God: we know well that God is Father, that he loves us and wants our salvation, and he always forgives, always; thus, there is no reason to be scared of him! Fear of the Lord, instead, is the gift of the Holy Spirit through whom we are reminded of how small we are before God and of his love and that our good lies in humble, respectful and trusting self-abandonment into his hands. This is fear of the Lord: abandonment in the goodness of our Father who loves us so much.

*When we are pervaded by fear of the Lord, then we are led to follow the Lord with humility, docility and obedience. This, however, is not an attitude of resignation, passivity or regret, but one of the wonder and joy of being a child who knows he is served and loved by the Father. Fear of the Lord, therefore, does not make of us Christians who are shy and submissive, but stirs in us courage and strength! It is a gift that makes of us Christians who are convinced, enthusiastic, who aren't submissive to the Lord out of fear but because we are moved and conquered by his love! To be conquered by the love of God! This is a beautiful thing. To allow ourselves to be conquered by this love of a father, who loves us so, loves us with all his heart. **See more from Pope Francis' Audience from June 11, 2014.***

2. Are you able to see the divine drama reflected in your own life story? Can you try to explain how the events of your life reflect the biblical drama of the search for love, falling through sin and rising again in redemption through some grace?
3. How is marital love Eucharistic?

Meditation

The love and commitment of marriage and family life is renewed each day. When couples exchange their vows they embark on a life-long journey to holiness that is re-expressed each day and in each action. The love that is exchanged on the wedding day must be made concrete every day in every part of daily life shared by the couple. This is how the grace of the marriage sacrament transforms the lives of husband and wife. Every day presents new moments for grace to penetrate their individual lives. The transformational graces of marriage do not happen in one moment at the altar when vows are exchanged; rather, that is the launching point for a life of dedicated service to each other.

However, no merely human love can ever be enough to complete another human being. We are made for the love of God. It is His love for us and our response to Him that is the fulfillment of all desire. Even married couples will never be able to be the absolute fulfillment for each other. They minister to each other in growing in the love of God, which is their perfection. Spouses show each other a kind of mercy when they do not expect from each other total completion. The spouses need each other. They need to pray with and for each other, but they also need their own personal relationship with God in order to live out their commitment to each other and to grow in personal freedom. Fulfilling the marriage covenant will require an individual and personal commitment to God, then to each other.

Nevertheless, family prayer is essential spirituality. At the heart of each family spirituality should be the Sunday Eucharist, a true family pilgrimage to the parish church. The family rosary, prayers before bed and domestic celebrations of feast days are also great means by which to keep the grace of the marriage sacrament stirring.

As the family members grow in mutual love, reflecting the love of God for them and in them, they are also called to a social love outside of the family. Love is never meant to be constrained; it is meant to reach beyond its origin out to peripheries. Family love begins at home but is then meant to reach to neighbors, local parishes, schools, colleagues at work and other friends. In this way the family truly becomes an icon of the creative love of the Blessed Trinity.

Part VII: Spirituality of the Family

Opening Prayer:

Praise the LORD!

Blessed is the man who fears the LORD,

who greatly delights in his commandments!

His descendants will be mighty in the land;

the generation of the upright will be blessed.

Wealth and riches are in his house;

and his righteousness endures for ever (Psalm 112:1-3).

Amoris Laetitia, #319 by Pope Francis:

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", since "a person who cannot choose to love for ever can hardly love for even a single day". 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).

Part II: The Experience of Family Love

Opening Prayer:

Psalm 37:3-9

Trust in the LORD, and do good;

so you will dwell in the land, and enjoy security.

Take delight in the LORD,

and he will give you the desires of your heart.

Commit your way to the LORD;

trust in him, and he will act.

He will bring forth your vindication as the light,

and your right as the noonday.

Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him;

fret not yourself over him who prospers in his way,

over the man who carries out evil devices!

Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath!

Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.

For the wicked shall be cut off;

but those who wait for the LORD shall possess the land.

Amoris Laetitia, #35 by Pope Francis:

As Christians, we can hardly stop advocating marriage simply to avoid countering contemporary sensibilities, or out of a desire to be fashionable or a sense of helplessness in the face of human and moral failings. We would be depriving the world of values that we can and must offer. It is true that there is no sense in simply decrying present-day evils, as if this could change things. Nor is it helpful to try to impose rules by sheer authority. What we need is a more responsible and generous effort to present the reasons and motivations for choosing marriage and the family, and in this way to help men and women better to respond to the grace that God offers them.

Meditation

There can be no denying that culture has changed radically and often severely in the past several decades. Some changes in our world have been very good and others have been a true danger to real love and family life. Those who seek to live authentic family love are often unsupported by a culture that progressively favors satisfaction in extreme individual expression rather than in pursuing communion. These cultural forces have in many respects led to isolation and deep loneliness because the underlying message of much of contemporary society is that freedom exists in satisfying one's own personal desires, whatever they may be. Personal freedom however is not in simply pursuing our desires at all costs but in responsibly pursuing truly noble goals worthy of human dignity and of the glory of God, and disciplining oneself so as to be capable of authentic love.

Family life has come under threat in this culture because we are often trained to believe that marriage and family are simply for convenience or for the mere satisfaction of temporary emotional needs. But when the demands of marriage and family call us out of ourselves into service and away from personal, individual goals, then we are taught that it is acceptable to discard the things and people that seem to hold us back.

Families face constant tensions and challenges in our times. The need for work often keeps families apart due to such things as travel, or long hours or multiple jobs, the need for migration to find a family wage or the desire for constant promotion. Forms of entertainment that discourage family time such as excessive amounts of watching television as a form of distraction or that encourage alternative forms of love that are not life-giving are prevalent. So too are the relational challenges within multiple families that arise from divorce and remarriage. The Church must walk the path of suffering love with each family so that it may find new sources of hope and constancy in following the great and difficult task of family love.

Temptations to condemn, gossip about or quarrel with people who struggle with these or many other difficulties

Spiritual Exercises

1. What do you think and feel are some important ways couples should prepare for marriage? Can you list significant lessons that should be learned while engaged?
2. Can you name a time of crisis from which you arose triumphant and with growth?
3. What are your thoughts on the Pope's remarks concerning complementarity?

*Complementarity lies at the foundation of marriage and the family, which is the first school where we learn to appreciate our talents and those of others, and where we begin to acquire the art of living together. For most of us, the family is the principal place in which we begin to "breathe" values and ideals, as we develop our full capacity for virtue and charity. At the same time, as we know, in families tensions arise: between egoism and altruism, between reason and passion, between immediate desires and long-term goals, and so on. But families also provide the environment in which these tensions are resolved: this is important. When we speak of complementarity between man and woman in this context, we must not confuse the term with the simplistic idea that all the roles and relationships of both sexes are confined to a single and static model. Complementarity assumes many forms, since every man and every woman brings their personal contribution — personal richness, their own charisma — to the marriage and to the upbringing of their children. Thus, complementarity becomes a great treasure. It is not only an asset but is also a thing of beauty. **For more see Pope Francis' address to the International Colloquium on the Complementarity Between Man and Woman on November 17, 2014.***

answer whether he or she can meet the need requested by the speaking spouse.

Both spouses have their chance to share their observations, feelings, judgments and needs through these steps and to do so in safety and surety that the other is listening with care and desiring to receive the gift of this deep communication of the heart.

While it may seem contrived in the beginning, following this method will allow spouses to develop the art of communicating honestly and listening deeply with care. Eventually the art becomes second-nature and the spouses learn how to be creative in their communication with each other.

Prayer to Mary, Lady of Listening by Pope Francis

Mary, woman of listening, open our ears; grant us to know how to listen to the word of your Son Jesus among the thousands of words of this world; grant that we may listen to the reality in which we live, to every person we encounter, especially those who are poor, in need, in hardship.

Mary, woman of decision, illuminate our mind and our heart, so that we may obey, unhesitating, the word of your Son Jesus; give us the courage to decide, not to let ourselves be dragged along, letting others direct our life.

Mary, woman of action, obtain that our hands and feet move “with haste” toward others, to bring them the charity and love of your Son Jesus, to bring the light of the Gospel to the world, as you did.
Amen.

is something that must be resisted by the disciples of Christ. Truth can never be a weapon with which to bludgeon someone, but must be shared in the form of a loving gift. What is needed to help others to grow in family love are opportunities for grace more than doctrinal statements. Authentic Christian witness leads to a real experience of the Holy Spirit’s action in our lives.

Grace should be understood as the quality of our relationship with God. The more intimate the encounter with the living God, Father, son and Holy Spirit, the greater is the grace one enjoys. We need to learn spiritual discernment so as to develop the language of God and to be capable of recognizing when we are being led by the Spirit of God or by the spirit of the world.

One particular threat to authentic family love is the message of the world that identity is fluid and can change at the choice of the individual. While those who struggle with gender confusion and the severe anxieties of the maturing process must be loved and assisted in their struggles with compassion, the anti-body language of the world can never be accepted. It is this that leads to self-hatred and to the rejection of what is truly human, namely, that we are our bodies and those bodies are the means by which we live in the present moment and can become a gift for others, and through which we receive the gifts that others are for us. The human body is a gift that comes with a task. We must discipline our bodies and train them through grace to become a gift for others. The body is not a mistake or an incidental and temporary traveling case for our inner selves.

Also alarming are the various uses of technology to separate the act of procreation from the physical love of husband and wife. Marriage is about two forms of love that are “two sides to one coin,” you cannot have one without the other. The two loves of marriage are openness to new life and the union of the spouses. Both are necessary, essential and good. Contraception is attempting to have the union of the spouses without the openness to new life, while generating new life in a laboratory is openness to new life without the spousal union. Neither of these approaches is an authentic fulfillment of family love.

domestic church is a critical mission of the Church today. That is as simple as sharing meals together and being present to one another in a variety of circumstances that lead to intimate communication. It requires family prayer times, discussions about the Catholic faith, including how it is necessary to possess a well-formed conscience, and an understanding of how certain cultural forces oppose God's will, and what constitutes our full development as persons and as families. If children see their parents being guided by the faith in their daily lives and participating in God's glory through prayer and sacraments, then they too will learn that this is the proper way of life in an often confusing world.

Prayer by Pope Francis

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures.
You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.
Pour out upon us the power of your love,
that we may protect life and beauty.
Fill us with peace, that we may live
as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

O God of the poor,
help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth,
so precious in your eyes.
Bring healing to our lives,
that we may protect the world and not prey on it,
that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.
Touch the hearts
of those who look only for gain
at the expense of the poor and the earth.
Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,
to be filled with awe and contemplation,
to recognize that we are profoundly united
with every creature
as we journey towards your infinite light.
We thank you for being with us each day.
Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle
for justice, love and peace. Amen.

Meditation

Married love, like wine, is often bubbly, a little fruity perhaps and thin in its initial stages. As a fine wine ages it becomes thicker, more complex with a range of flavors, with more body and heartiness, as does married love. The spouses that weather the "bad times", the sicknesses and the crises are the ones whose love for each other has become thick, like blood, deep and true. Along with prayer, spouses must develop the art of communication to walk with each other through the stages of life.

Spouses should find time on a regular basis, say at least once per week, where they can be alone to have a deep heart to heart exchange. This time will require charity, patience, courage and honesty. Here is one method of developing deeper communication on the level of the heart:

Both husband and wife speak one at a time, each getting a turn to go through all the steps. When one spouse is taking the turn to speak, the other is listening deeply, with humility and care, without ever interrupting.

Step 1: Observation. The speaking spouse mentions something he or she has observed. Only facts at this point. "I see this; I heard that."

Step 2: Feelings. The speaking spouse mentions the feelings that were generated as a result of the observations. No claim is being made that there is right or wrong, good or bad, only that this is what was genuinely being felt as the observation was happening and afterward.

Step 3: Judgment. As a result of those feelings some judgments were being made in the mind of the speaking spouse. No claim is being made that the judgment is right or wrong, good or bad, only that they are honestly what he or she is thinking as a result of what was observed and felt.

Step 4: Need. The speaking spouse communicates to the other what is needed from the other. The listening spouse then should repeat back all that was heard and confirm that he or she has indeed heard what was said and understands. Then, the listening spouse must

Opening Prayer:**Psalm 71:1-6**

*In thee, O LORD, do I take refuge;
let me never be put to shame!*

*In thy righteousness deliver me and rescue me;
incline thy ear to me, and save me!*

*Be thou to me a rock of refuge,
a strong fortress, to save me,
for thou art my rock and my fortress.*

*Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked,
from the grasp of the unjust and cruel man.*

*For thou, O Lord, art my hope,
my trust, O LORD, from my youth.*

*Upon thee I have leaned from my birth;
thou art he who took me from my mother's womb.
My praise is continually of thee.*

Amoris Laetitia, #232 by Pope Francis:

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.

1. Pope Francis says that we must rise above complaints and the thought that we can simply preach to others about the virtues of marriage and family life. He says we must offer a compelling account of the beauty of Christian marriage and family life. Are you able to consider how you might accomplish this or how that could be done?
2. Discernment is the spiritual practice by which we learn God's love language with us and also the tactics of the enemy spirit to make us fall. As you have proceeded through this book have you noticed any internal patterns of thinking and feeling that have brought you closer to God or further away? Can you identify those patterns?
3. Psalm 37 says to "*Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him.*" Reflect on what Pope Francis says about the patience of Simeon.

The patience of Simeon. Let us take a closer look at that old man's patience. For his entire life, he had been waiting, exercising the patience of the heart. In his prayer, Simeon had learned that God does not come in extraordinary events, but works amid the apparent monotony of our daily life, in the frequently dull rhythm of our activities, in the little things that, working with tenacity and humility, we achieve in our efforts to do his will. By patiently persevering, Simeon did not grow weary with the passage of time. He was now an old man, yet the flame still burned brightly in his heart. In his long life, there had surely been times when he had been hurt, disappointed, yet he did not lose hope. He trusted in the promise, and did not let himself be consumed by regret for times past or by the sense of despondency that can come as we approach the twilight of our lives. His hope and expectation found expression in the daily patience of a man who, despite everything, remained watchful, until at last "his eyes saw the salvation" that had been promised (cf. Lk 2:30). See more from Pope Francis' homily on February 2, 2021.

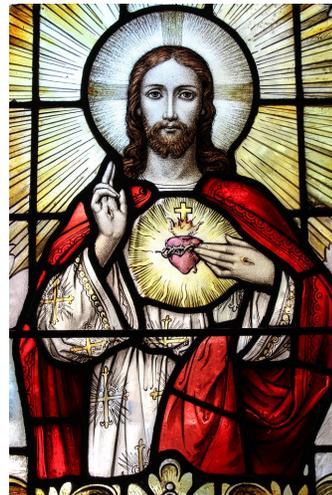
Opening Prayer:

Psalm 77:11-15

*I will call to mind the deeds of the LORD;
yea, I will remember thy wonders of old.
I will meditate on all thy work,
and muse on thy mighty deeds.
Thy way, O God, is holy.
What god is great like our God?
Thou art the God who workest wonders,
who hast manifested thy might among the peoples.
Thou didst with thy arm redeem thy people,
the sons of Jacob and Joseph.*

Amoris Laetitia, #62 by Pope Francis:

Jesus, “in speaking of God’s original plan for man and woman, reaffirmed the indissoluble union between them, even stating that ‘it was for your hardness of heart that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so’ (Mt 19:8). The indissolubility of marriage – ‘what God has joined together, let no man put asunder’ (Mt 19:6) – should not be viewed as a ‘yoke’ imposed on humanity, but as a ‘gift’ granted to those who are joined in marriage... God’s indulgent love always accompanies our human journey; through grace, it heals and transforms hardened hearts, leading them back to the beginning through the way of the cross. The Gospels clearly present the example of Jesus who... proclaimed the meaning of marriage as the fullness of revelation that restores God’s original plan (cf. Mt 19:3)”.⁵⁵



Sacred Heart of Jesus. Stained glass window from St Casimir's church in Baltimore, MD. Photo by Lawrence Lew, O.P. Flickr.

1. What are some of the dreams you have had about your family?
2. Are you familiar with the steps of spiritual discernment, especially of a vocation from God?
3. What does it mean for the “Lord to build a house” as it says in Psalm 127? See what Pope Francis says about “setting out” by the call of God.

Like Abraham, all husbands and wives “set out” from their own land at the moment when, in response to the vocation to conjugal love, they decide to give themselves to each other without reserve. Becoming engaged already means setting out from your land, since it calls you to walk together along the road that leads to marriage. Different situations in life, the passage of time, the arrival of children, work and illness, all challenge couples to embrace anew their commitment to one another, to leave behind settled habits, certainties and security, and to set out towards the land that God promises: to be two in Christ, two in one. Your lives become a single life; you become a “we” in loving communion with Jesus, alive and present at every moment of your existence. God is always at your side; he loves you unconditionally. You are not alone! For more see Pope Francis’ Letter to Married Couples for the Amoris Laetitia Year.



Abraham Departs.
Public Domain

the individual. Family life teaches how to value differences in personalities and talents among the family members and how to appreciate the need for those differences. The first school of socializing and peaceful interaction is the family. Observing mom and dad lovingly interact and manage all the family dynamics in a way that respects all the members of the family are foundational lessons for children in the formation of community.

Prayer to the Immaculate Conception by Pope Francis

O Mary Immaculate,
we gather around you once again.
The more we move forward in life
the more our gratitude to God increases for giving as a Mother to us
who are sinners, you, the Immaculate Conception.
Of all human beings, you are the only one preserved from sin, as
Mother of Jesus,
the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
But this singular privilege of yours
was given to you for the good of us all, your children.
In fact, looking at you, we see the victory of Christ,
the victory of God's love over evil:
where sin abounded, namely, in the human heart,
grace has overflowed all the more,
through the gentle power of Jesus' Blood.

We thank you, Immaculate Mother,
for reminding us that, because of Jesus Christ's love,
we are no longer slaves to sin,
but free, free to love, to love one another,
to help one another as brothers and sisters, despite our differences
and thank you for the differences between us.
Thank you, because with your purity, you encourage us
not to be ashamed of good, but of evil;
you help us to keep at a distance the evil one, who deceives us and
draws us to himself, into coils of death;
you grant us the gentle reminder that we are children of God,
Father of immense goodness, eternal source of life, beauty and love.
Amen.

Meditation

Every sacrament has a proper minister: one who celebrates the sacrament validly. In the Eucharist it is the bishop or priest who validly celebrates and consecrates the Eucharist. In marriage it is the couple, the man and the woman who are the ministers. In their speaking the vows and consenting to be a gift to each other and to God they make the sacrament of marriage happen. Later the marriage is consummated in the physical embrace of the couple. It is in the consent to be a self-gift to the spouse and in physical consummation that the two become truly one flesh. In making this sacrament the Christian couple truly experiences something of the love within God.

In exchanging their vows the man and the woman say "yes" to each other and to God. To what exactly are they saying "yes"? There are four concrete components that make a marriage. All four must be present to truly have a sacramental marriage.

1. Fidelity— "You and no other"
2. Openness to conceiving children without artificially preventing it
3. The good of the spouse— "I live to help you become a saint"
4. The Sacrament— "Our love is permanent and images the love of Christ for the Church"

These four components make a marriage, and it is to these that the spouses consent for life. It is living for these things that make love more than a sentiment, but a reality full of hopes and fears, joys, failures and recoveries. It is these four components that give marriage its substance and its power.

Throughout its entire history the central proclamation of the Church is that God loves us. He will never abandon us. His love is permanent. But it is one thing to say it and another to experience it. What is God's love like? It is like a marriage. That is what sacramental marriage ultimately accomplishes. It allows the family to experience what God's love is like, and it is a sign to the world that love like that really does exist. A permanent bond that creates new life, generates grace, gives glory to God and results in a man and a woman

living for the true good of the other, not oneself, gives hope to the world that such love is possible. The grace of the sacrament, that is the very power of God's life and love, flows into the hearts of husband and wife when they live for the four components of marriage. Every human person is supposed to have the experience of knowing that it is good to be alive and that you can rest secure knowing that someone is there for you always. It is the mission of sacramental marriage to accomplish this.

Real love, Godly love, does not have an end point. The surest sign of love is that it expands beyond itself and reaches others. There can be no greater natural fulfillment of this than the bringing forth into the world of a new human person. While it is not the teaching of Christ's Church that a couple must have as many children as they are physically capable of, it is the teaching that every act of physical love can only truly be love when it is open to the possibility of new life. Any artificial means that are used to prevent life block love from its natural expansion into others. Physical love that is open to the miracle of new life is truly authentic. It is the greatest privilege for a husband and wife to be partners with God in bringing forth a new person. There are times, of course, when, for whatever sad reason, children cannot be conceived. The pain of that situation is real, and the Church walks with all couples in compassion as they experience such a thing. Still, it is always necessary to know that children are a gift, not a right. Sometimes it may be that a couple is called with the sacrificial task of adopting children. In this way, a husband and wife fulfill the purpose of love to grow beyond itself and reach others. Whether it is with natural or adoptive children, the task of loving new life also requires the serious responsibility of educating children. Preparing children for adulthood and for the discernment of their own vocations is a noble task God assigns to all married couples.

Fulfilling the four goals of marriage is a truly heroic task and no couple is meant to do so in isolation. The Church offers its devotions, its sacraments, its prayers, its missionaries and its parishes and the Word of God in Scripture and Tradition to aid married couples in the hard work of love. Married couples too aid the Church by living out their own sacrament and becoming a domestic church where a family grows together in faith, hope and charity and passes on the great legacy of the saints to new generations.

Meditation

The development of our capacity for mature love receives its greatest promotion from our families. Every child has the right to the love of a father and a mother. It is not just that the individual love for the child of father and mother respectively is important but that the mutual love of father and mother for each other is vital for the growth of children. It is always best for a child to experience within the life of the family that he or she is the fruit of the love of the father and mother. Children are not the playthings nor the trophies of parents. Children have a right to be living examples of the love of the parents, the love that naturally produced them. Through observing the interactions of parents a child receives and learns about the different but complimentary ways that love is expressed by a man and by a woman. In the Christian family we receive both ways of loving.

Every mother and father naturally has dreams for and about their children. Parents consider what life will be like with the new baby. Some parents have yearned for a child and when they come they find a deep happiness. This deep feeling of happiness is a gift for the child. How precious it is for a child to know, see and feel that they are a source of joy for their parents. Children need to be rooted in this parental happiness.

Parents also dream of what potentials the child may have for the future. All of these dreams are natural, but parents must always recall two things: God also has "dreams" for His children; and children have dreams of their own. Teaching children that God has plans for them, that each one of them has a vocation that only they can fulfill, and that the greatest adventure in life is to discern that vocation and fulfill it is a critical task of parenthood.

Through their sharing the unique joy they feel for each individual child, and by teaching the unique love and plan of God for them, parents become true partners with God in nurturing a child to come to discover his or her purpose for life.

Finally, through the family children begin to learn true fraternity. Family love teaches children to learn the value of solidarity, of working toward the common good of the whole, rather than just

Part V: Fruitful Love

Opening Prayer:

Psalm 127

*Unless the LORD builds the house,
those who build it labor in vain.
Unless the LORD watches over the city,
the watchman stays awake in vain.
It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest,
eating the bread of anxious toil;
for! he gives to his beloved sleep.*

*Lo, sons are a heritage from the LORD,
the fruit of the womb a reward.
Like arrows in the hand of a warrior
are the sons of one's youth.
Happy is the man who has
his quiver full of them!
He shall not be put to shame
when he speaks with his enemies in the gate.*

Amoris Laetitia, #166 by Pope Francis:

For “when speaking of children who come into the world, no sacrifice made by adults will be considered too costly or too great, if it means the child never has to feel that he or she is a mistake, or worthless or abandoned to the four winds and the arrogance of man”. The gift of a new child, entrusted by the Lord to a father and a mother, begins with acceptance, continues with lifelong protection and has as its final goal the joy of eternal life. By serenely contemplating the ultimate fulfillment of each human person, parents will be even more aware of the precious gift entrusted to them. For God allows parents to choose the name by which he himself will call their child for all eternity.

Loving one person day in and day out, raising children and supporting a family is a task that truly requires so many virtues such as endurance, patience, mercy, resilience, prudence, courage and many more. This is what makes marriage and family love a truly divine reality. Family love requires that a person becomes the very best version of himself, and that is what makes marriage and family truly great. It is also why families need a sacrament of their own, the marriage sacrament. The sacrament of matrimony is not just a ritual; it is truly Jesus Christ himself touching the husband and wife, strengthening them and keeping them close to his Sacred Heart.

Prayer by Pope Francis

O God, Trinity of love,
from the profound communion of your divine life,
pour out upon us a torrent of fraternal love.
Grant us the love reflected in the actions of Jesus,
in his family of Nazareth,
and in the early Christian community.

Grant that we Christians may live the Gospel,
discovering Christ in each human being,
recognizing him crucified
in the sufferings of the abandoned
and forgotten of our world,
and risen in each brother or sister
who makes a new start.

Come, Holy Spirit, show us your beauty,
reflected in all the peoples of the earth,
so that we may discover anew
that all are important and all are necessary,
different faces of the one humanity
that God so loves. Amen.

Spiritual Exercises

1. Make a prayer to Jesus, Mary and Joseph in your words describing your love history and where you need healing. Ask for the grace to trust in God's plan for love and marriage.
2. Can you recall and list some special and specific goodness that your spouse, children and/or family brought to you? Express gratitude for these and share them with your family.
3. Psalm 77 mentions that *"I will call to mind the deeds of the LORD."* Can you list some of the deeds the Lord has fulfilled in your life that bring you hope? See the comments on memory by Pope Francis.

It is vital to remember the good we have received. If we do not remember it, we become strangers to ourselves, "passers-by" of existence. Without memory, we uproot ourselves from the soil that nourishes us and allow ourselves to be carried away like leaves in the wind. If we do remember, however, we bind ourselves afresh to the strongest of ties; we feel part of a living history, the living experience of a people. Memory is not something private; it is the path that unites us to God and to others. This is why in the Bible the memory of the Lord must be passed on from generation to generation. Fathers are commanded to tell the story to their sons, as we read in a beautiful passage. "When your son asks you in time to come, 'What is the meaning of the decrees and the statutes and the ordinances which the Lord our God has commanded you?', then you shall say to your son, 'We were slaves... [think of the whole history of slavery!], and the Lord showed signs and wonders... before our eyes'" (Deut 6:20-22). You shall hand down this memory to your son. See more from Pope Francis' homily on June 14, 2020.



Holy Matrimony. Mural from St Mary's Basilica in Detroit. Photo by Lawrence Lew, O.P. Flickr

Spiritual Exercises

1. Are you able to identify and describe experiences in your life when you loved or were loved in a consumerist way vs a contemplative way?
2. Reflect on Psalm 118:1-6. What emotions arose in your heart after slowly praying these verses? What thoughts brought you closer to God?
3. Reflect on what Pope Francis says about love.

Jesus says to his disciples: "he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (Mt 10:38). This means following him along the path that he himself trod, without looking for shortcuts. There is no true love without the cross, that is, without a personal price to pay. Many mothers, many fathers who sacrifice a great deal for their children, and bear true sacrifices, crosses, because they love them, say this. And the cross is not frightening when borne with Jesus, because he is always at our side to support us in the hour of the most difficult trial, to give us strength and courage. Nor is it helpful to get agitated to preserve one's own life through fearful or egotistical behaviour. Jesus admonishes: "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake" — that is, for love, for love of Jesus, love for one's neighbour, for service towards others — "will find it" (v. 39). This is the Gospel paradox. But we have many, many examples of this too, thank God! We see it in these days. How many people, how many people, are bearing crosses to help others; they sacrifice themselves to help others who are in need in this pandemic. But, always with Jesus, it can be done. The fullness of life and of joy is found by giving oneself for the Gospel and for our brothers and sisters, with openness, welcoming and goodness. For more see Pope Francis' Angelus Reflection on June 28, 2020.

Prayer to Our Lady by Pope Francis

Mary, Virgin and Mother,
you who, moved by the Holy Spirit,
welcomed the word of life in the depths of your humble faith:
as you gave yourself completely to the Eternal One,
help us to say our own “yes” to the urgent call, as pressing as ever,
to proclaim the good news of Jesus.

Filled with Christ’s presence,
you brought joy to John the Baptist,
making him exult in the womb of his mother.
Brimming over with joy,
you sang of the great things done by God.
Standing at the foot of the cross with unyielding faith,
you received the joyful comfort of the resurrection,
and joined the disciples in awaiting the Spirit
so that the evangelizing Church might be born.

Obtain for us now a new ardour born of the resurrection,
that we may bring to all the Gospel of life
which triumphs over death.
Give us a holy courage to seek new paths,
that the gift of unfading beauty may reach every man and woman.

Virgin of listening and contemplation,
Mother of love, Bride of the eternal wedding feast,
pray for the Church, whose pure icon you are,
that she may never be closed in on herself
or lose her passion for establishing God’s kingdom.

Star of the new evangelization,
help us to bear radiant witness to communion,
service, ardent and generous faith, justice and love of the poor,
that the joy of the Gospel may reach to the ends of the earth,
illuminating even the fringes of our world.

Mother of the living Gospel,
wellspring of happiness for God’s little ones,
pray for us. Amen. Alleluia!

Part IV: Marital Love

Opening Prayer:

Psalm 118: 1-6

*I love thee, O LORD, my strength.
The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer,
my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.
I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised,
and I am saved from my enemies.*

*The cords of death encompassed me,
the torrents of perdition assailed me;
the cords of Sheol entangled me,
the snares of death confronted me.*

*In my distress I called upon the LORD;
to my God I cried for help.
From his temple he heard my voice,
and my cry to him reached his ears.*

Amoris Laetitia, #89 by Pope Francis:

All that has been said so far 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 and family love. Indeed, the grace of the sacrament of marriage is intended before all else “to perfect the couple’s love”. Here too we can say that, “even if I have faith so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing” (1 Cor 13:2-3). The word “love”, however, is commonly used and often misused.

Meditation

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
(1 Cor. 13:4-7)

St. Paul defines what love does and what attitude it engenders in a person. Here is the recipe for making marriage work, and it is also what the sacrament of marriage produces in a person. Through the good times and the bad times, in sickness and in health, marital grace burrows its way deeper and deeper into the human heart to produce the kind of love St. Paul describes.

Living in a consumerist society has trained us all to think that everything is “your way, right away.” Even if unconscious we often look at and evaluate everything based on how it will benefit us or bring us pleasure. This consumerist way of thinking also affects our relationships and even marriage. It can be possible to think that the only true purpose of a spouse is to bring us emotional satisfaction. Once our emotional satisfaction is perceived to be unfulfilled the marriage or the relationship can become threatened or even ended. Consumerist thinking and its advertising makes us believe that everything, including people, must be perfect in every way, always shiny and new, never growing old or failing. A spouse and children, or any true friend, are not upgradeable.

Consumerist thinking is in no regard compatible with the Christian meaning of love nor with the Sacrament of Marriage and what its graces empower us to do for one another.

None of us is born ready to love in the Christian way, the way of Christ, though the capacity is given to us in baptism. That capacity for sacrificial love to the end is something we mature into through the years of our pilgrimage of life. That pilgrimage requires contemplative love. To be contemplative is to live within the wonder of something beautiful. Contemplative prayer experiences the beauty of God and treasures it. Contemplative love is something also required within families. Consumerist love looks only at the physical

beauty of another and seeks to possess it for one’s own selfish good. This is not contemplative love, which seeks to behold and cherish the mystery of the other person.

Contemplative love is constant in considering and marveling at the inner truth of the person loved. A husband must behold his wife not merely for her physical looks but more importantly for her uniqueness as a creation of God, willed into existence by love and for love, a true daughter of God. A wife must behold her husband not just for his physical strength or shape but more importantly for his being a son of the Father with that fact being his deepest strength. Parents must also have a contemplative wonder and love for children, who come to them as gifts and belong to God as well. Contemplating these mysteries helps to resist the inevitable temptations to take other family members for granted or to consider them as burdens. Marriage and family are responsibilities that certainly have their challenges, but when they are faced within contemplative love they stretch us and develop our capacity to love in the self-giving, sacrificial manner of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The mutual struggles of a family only make the joy of the triumphs all the richer, truer and deeper because all things were faced together and for one another. Inevitably physical attractiveness and strength wane; it is the usual course of our bodily lives. Consumerist love loses affection for the person whose physical features do not remain the same with age. But when contemplative love is able to see the unique person who is manifested in their bodies, the affection will be all the stronger.

Contemplative love is also necessary for the full physical intimacy of a husband and wife. Spiritual discernment involves awareness of the movements of one’s heart and passions. Discernment seeks the origins and purposes of particular passions and attractions felt within. Is this strong passion I am feeling for my spouse right now a desire for communion, self-giving, and cherishing, or is it simply to satisfy a personal want? This is what discernment asks of oneself. Desire for a spouse is not evil, but it must be desire that upholds the unique, personal dignity of the spouse. That kind of desire is not to satisfy an urge but to unite with a person with whom are shared all of the joys, hopes, fears and trials of life. There are many different expressions of love besides passion. All of the various forms of loving expression affirm the goodness of each person’s dignity.