

Section 31

“The Joy of Love,” the Way of Compassion

“The Joy of Love experienced by families is also the joy of the Church.” (Amoris Laetitia 1). This opening phrase of Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation ‘the Joy of Love’ reminds us of the first sentence of “Gaudium et Spes”, ‘Joy and Hope’, a famous document of the Second Vatican Council (1965). This document opens by saying: *“The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men and women of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.”* (Gaudium et Spes 1). These words are quite after the heart of people, who want to follow the way of the heart in daily life. In his reflections on family life in today’s society, Pope Francis also totally sympathizes with people’s happiness, struggles and suffering. In fact, the Pope puts into practice a Spirituality of the Heart.

The Pope is fully aware of the fact that in real life families go through a mixture of joy, hope, grief and anxiety. All these human experiences resonate in his heart and evoke a response of mercy and compassion. According to the Pope, the way of the Church should be the way of mercy and compassion. For Pope Francis ‘mercy’ and ‘compassion’ are not just sentiments of feeling sorry for someone’s pain. ‘Mercy’ and ‘compassion’ show itself by being attentive to people’s sorrow and distress, as well as by practicing solidarity, accompaniment and care, as far as possible and needed.

The Pope cares about entire humankind. He sees humankind as one big family, in which God expects us to treat our *“fellow human beings as brothers and sisters”* (Amoris Laetitia 183). In this worldwide family, the Church is sent to be *“a mother who always welcomes (her children), takes care of them with affection and encourages them along the path of life and the Gospel”* (Amoris Laetitia 299), *“even if in the process, her shoes get soiled by the mud of the street”* (Amoris Laetitia 308). *“It is a matter of reaching out to everyone,”* the Pope insists, *“helping each person to find his or her proper way of participating in the*

ecclesial community.” By doing so, we let people experience, “being touched by an unmerited, unconditional and gratuitous mercy” (Amoris Laetitia 297).

A Reflective Moment

*“In the variety of situations affecting families
the Church is commissioned to proclaim
the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel,
which in its own way must penetrate
the mind and heart of every person.*

*She knows that Jesus himself is the shepherd of the hundred,
not just of the ninety-nine.
He loves them all.*

*We cannot forget that
mercy is not only the working of the Father;
it becomes a norm for knowing who his true children are.
In a word, we are called to show mercy
because mercy was first shown to us. ...*

*For mercy is the very foundation of the Church’s life....
The Church is the house of the Father,
where there is a place for everyone,
with all their problems.”
(Pope Francis, Amoris Laetitia 309).*