

## Section 35

### “The Experiences and Challenges of Families”

#### Part 1: Some Challenges from within

In the second Chapter of ‘Amoris Laetitia’ Pope Francis looks at *“the reality of the family today in all its complexity, with both its lights and shadows”* (AL 32). The chapter opens with the sentence: *“The welfare of the family is decisive for the future of the world and that of the Church”* (AL 31). First of all the Pope welcomes the fact that *“families have come to enjoy greater freedom through a fair distribution of duties, responsibilities and tasks”,* as well as *“a greater emphasis on personal communication between the spouses”* (AL 32) In the same strain he declares that *“the equal dignity of men and women makes us rejoice to see old forms of discrimination disappear. Within families there is a growing reciprocity”* (AL 54). These developments, the Pope affirms, *“help to make family life more humane”* (AL 33).

However, the Pope also reminds us to beware of *“extreme individualism which weakens family bonds and ... leads to intolerance and hostility in families”* (AL 33). Love is certainly the heart of the marriage bond, but the Pope warns against *“a purely emotional and romantic conception of love”* (AL 40). He advises that *“a narcissistic, unstable or changeable affectivity does not always allow a person to grow to maturity”* (AL 41). It may even become a reason why people easily move *“from one affective relationship to another”* (AL 39).

As a remedy against a wide-spread *“culture of the ephemeral”* (AL 39), the Pope wants to promote the attitude of *true love* which involves the practice of *“self-giving”* (AL 39). He quotes the Second Vatican Council which *“defined marriage as a community of life and love.”* While placing love at the center of the family, the Council declared that *“true love between husband and wife involves mutual self-giving, which includes and integrates the sexual and affective dimensions, in accordance with God’s plan”* (AL 67; cf. Pastoral Constitution ‘Gaudium et Spes’, 48-49).

In this second chapter the Pope describes in more detail the challenges that spouses have to face in family life. In the next section, we will see how the Pope also comments on social structures that in many places in the world may harm family life.

## **A reflective moment**

*“I thank God that many families,  
which are far from considering themselves perfect,  
live in love,  
fulfil their calling  
and keep moving forward,  
even if they fall many times along the way.*

....

*There is no stereo- type of the ideal family,  
but rather a challenging mosaic  
made up of many different realities,  
with all their joys, hopes and problems.”*

(Pope Francis, Amoris Laetitia n. 57).