

Section 38
MARRIED LIFE:
THE SACRAMENT OF “MUTUAL SELF-GIVING” (AL 73)

In his letter ‘the Joy of Love’ (‘Amoris Laetitia’), Pope Francis shows us how to look at marriage and family life with the eyes of faith. “*The sacrament of marriage is not a social convention, an empty ritual or merely the outward sign of a commitment,*” the Pope writes (AL 72). Neither is it “*a single moment of the past*” (AL 215). Husband and wife “*need to be encouraged to see the sacrament of marriage rather as a reality that permanently influences the whole of their married life*” (AL 215).

Married life is a sacrament, because it is “*a dynamic process*” (AL 122), in which Jesus Christ himself takes part. Jesus Christ “*dwells*” with husband and wife, “*gives them the strength to take up their crosses..., to rise again after they have fallen, to forgive one another, to bear one another’s burdens*” (AL 73). “*The language of the body, and the signs of love*” (AL 215), “*the common life of husband and wife, the entire network of relations that they build with their children and the world around them*” (AL 74), become all together the sacrament of “*mutual self-giving*” (AL 73).

The Pope states that “*The couple that loves and begets life is a true, living image, capable of revealing God the Creator and Savior*” (AL 11). What is more, the Pope continues, “*the family is the image of God, who is a communion of persons*” (AL 71). “*Seen this way, the couple’s fruitful relationship becomes an image for understanding and describing the mystery of God himself. In the Christian vision of the Trinity, God is contemplated as Father, Son and Spirit of love. The triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection*” (AL 11). “*Saint John Paul II already shed light on this when he said, “Our God in his deepest mystery is not solitude, but a family”*” (AL 11).

The sacrament of marriage also reveals the profound meaning of God’s incarnation, “*whereby God showed the fullness of his love for humanity by becoming one with us*” (AL 74). The Second Vatican Council has declared that, “*by his incarnation the Son of God has united Himself in some fashion with every human being. He worked with human hands, he thought with a human mind,*

acted by human choice and loved with a human heart” (Gaudium et Spes n. 22). Husband and wife, who love one another in “a freely chosen mutual belonging marked by fidelity, respect and care” (AL 156), present a strong sign of Christ’s constant participation in human history. “The two are thus mutual reflections of that divine love which comforts with a word, a look, a helping hand, a caress, an embrace” (AL 321).

A Reflective Moment

*“The wedding ceremony is “just the beginning.”
By saying “I do,”
husband and wife embark on a journey
that requires them to overcome all obstacles
standing in the way of their reaching the goal.*

*The nuptial blessing that they receive
is a grace and an incentive for this journey.
They can only benefit from sitting down
and talking to one another about how, concretely,
they plan to achieve their goal” (AL 218).*

*“Neither spouse can expect the other to be perfect.
Each must set aside all illusions and accept the other
as he or she actually is:
an unfinished product, needing to grow,
a work in progress.*

*A persistently critical attitude towards one’s partner
is a sign that marriage was not entered into
as a project to be worked on together,
with patience, understanding, tolerance and generosity.”
(Pope Francis, Amoris Laetitia, n.218).*