

POPE FRANCIS ON MARRIAGE

Excerpts from *Amoris Laetitia (The Joy of Love)*

The Importance of Patience

We encounter problems whenever we think that relationships of people ought to be perfect, or when we put ourselves at the center and expect things to turn out our way. Then everything makes us impatient, everything makes us react aggressively. Unless we cultivate patience, we will always find excuses for responding angrily. We will end up incapable of living together, antisocial, unable to control our impulses, and our families will become battlegrounds. . . .

Patience takes root when I recognize that other people also have a right to live in this world, just as they are (n. 92). . . . As St. Ignatius of Loyola said, “Love is shown more by deeds than by words.” It thus shows its fruitfulness and allows us to experience the happiness of giving, the nobility and grandeur of spending ourselves unstintingly, without asking to be repaid, purely for the pleasure of giving and serving (n. 94).

The Nature of Love

True love values the other person’s achievements. It does not see him or her as a threat. It frees us from the sour taste of envy. It recognizes that everyone has different gifts and a unique path in life. So it strives to discover its own road to happiness, while allowing others to find theirs (n. 95).

To be open to a genuine encounter with others, “a kind look” is essential. This is incompatible with a negative attitude that readily points out other people’s shortcomings while overlooking one’s own. A kind look helps us to see beyond our limitations, to be patient and to cooperate with others, despite our differences. Loving kindness builds bonds, cultivates relationships, creates new networks of integration and knits a firm social fabric (n. 100).

If we accept that God’s love is unconditional, that the Father’s love cannot be bought or sold, then we will become capable of showing boundless love and forgiving others even if

they have wronged us. Otherwise, our family life will no longer be a place of understanding, support and encouragement, but rather one of constant tension and mutual criticism (n. 108).

Love is Central to a Happy Marriage

Married couples joined by love speak well of each other; they try to show their spouse’s good side, not their weakness and faults. In any event, they keep silent rather than speak ill of them. This is not merely a way of acting in front of others; it springs from an interior attitude. . . . The other person is much more than the sum of the little things that annoy me. Love does not have to be perfect for us to value it. . . . If I expect too much, the other person will let me know, for he or she can neither play God nor serve all my needs. Love coexists with imperfection. It “bears all things” and can hold its peace before the limitations of the loved one (n. 113).

Love trusts, it sets free, it does not try to control, possess and dominate everything. This freedom, which fosters independence, an openness to the world around us and to new experiences, can only enrich and expand relationships. The spouses then share with one another the joy of all they have received and learned outside the family circle (n. 115).

The Purpose of Life

Each person, with all his or her failings, is called to the fullness of life in heaven. There, fully transformed by Christ’s resurrection, every weakness, darkness and infirmity will pass away. There the person’s true being will shine forth in all its goodness and beauty. This realization helps us, amid the aggravations of this present life, to see each person from a supernatural perspective, in the light of hope, and await the fullness that he or she will receive in the heavenly kingdom, even if it is not yet visible (n. 117).

Married Love in God’s Plan

Marriage is a precious sign, for when a man and a woman celebrate the sacrament of

marriage, God is, as it were, “mirrored” in them; He impresses in them His own features and the indelible character of His love. Marriage is the icon of God’s love for us. . . . God is also communion: the three Persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit live eternally in perfect unity. And this is precisely the mystery of marriage: God makes of the two spouses one single existence (n. 121).

Marital Joy

Saint Thomas Aquinas said that the word “joy” refers to an expansion of the heart. Marital joy can be experienced even amid sorrow; it involves accepting that marriage is an inevitable mixture of enjoyment and struggles, tensions and repose, pain and relief, satisfactions and longings, annoyances and pleasures, but always on the path of friendship, which inspires married couples to care for one another (n. 126). . . . Few human joys are as deep and thrilling as those experienced by two people who love one another and have achieved something as the result of a great, shared effort (n. 130).

Commitment in Marriage

As a social institution, marriage protects and shapes a shared commitment to deeper growth in love and commitment to one another, for the good of society as a whole. That is why marriage is more than a fleeting fashion; it is of enduring importance. Its essence derives from our human nature and social character. It involves a series of obligations born of love itself, a love so serious and generous that it is ready to face any risk (n. 131).

If two persons are truly in love, they naturally show this to others. When love is expressed before others in the marriage contract, with all its public commitments, it clearly indicates and protects the “yes” which those persons speak freely and unreservedly to each other. This “yes” tells them that they can always trust one another, and that they will never be abandoned when difficulties arise or new attractions or selfish interests present themselves (n. 132).

The Lasting Nature of Love

In the course of every marriage physical appearances change, but this hardly means that

love and attraction need fade. . . . Although the body ages, it still expresses that personal identity that first won our heart. Even if others can no longer see the beauty of that identity, a spouse continues to see it with the eyes of love and so his or her affection does not diminish. He or she reaffirms the decision to belong to the other and expresses that choice in faithful and loving closeness. . . .

The marriage bond finds new forms of expression and constantly seeks new ways to grow in strength. These both preserve and strengthen the bond. They call for daily effort. None of this, however, is possible without praying to the Holy Spirit for an outpouring of His grace, His supernatural strength and His spiritual fire, to confirm, direct and transform our love in every new situation (n. 164).

Parenting in Accord with God’s Plan

Each child has a place in God’s heart from all eternity; once he or she is conceived, the Creator’s eternal dream comes true. Let us pause to think of the great value of that embryo from the moment of conception. We need to see it with the eyes of God, Who always looks beyond mere appearances (n. 168).

It is important for that child to feel wanted. He or she is not an accessory or a solution to some personal need. A child is a human being of immense worth and may never be used for one’s own benefit. So it matters little whether this new life is convenient for you, whether it has features that please you, or whether it fits into your plans and aspirations. For children are a gift. Each one is unique and irreplaceable. . . . The love of parents is the means by which God our Father shows His own love. He awaits the birth of each child, accepts that child unconditionally, and welcomes him or her freely (n. 170).

The Importance of Families

By their witness as well as their words, families speak to others of Jesus. They pass on the faith, they arouse a desire for God and they reflect the beauty of the Gospel and its way of life. Christian marriages thus enliven society by their witness. . . . Their fruitfulness expands and in countless ways makes God’s love present in society (n. 184).