

Amoris Laetitia, ch. 2

Acts 2: the Pentecost experience

Ps 103: *Send forth your Spirit, O Lord, and renew the face of the earth*

1Cor 12: *a variety of gifts, but always the same Spirit*

Jn 17: *He breathed on them and said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit ...'*

This joyous feast of Pentecost today — the 3rd-greatest feast in the Christian calendar — is an opportunity to pray devoutly for the gifts of the Spirit to be upon us, ‘fanning into a flame’ the Spirit we have received at Baptism and Confirmation. How much we need God’s gifts to live well!

We consider today the 2nd chapter of the Pope’s exhortation on Marriage and Family Life, *Amoris Laetitia*. After the opening chapter on the beautiful picture given us in the Scriptures — the love of God for His people, imaged in human Marriage and love in the family — Pope Francis turns to an analysis of the modern-day family, with its blessings, but also its challenges. The sort of challenges the Pope lists are many, and sum up many of the ills of society:

- “extreme individualism which weakens family bonds and ends up considering each member of the family as an isolated unit”;
- “today’s fast pace of life, stress and the organization of society and labour”;

- “a cultural decline that fails to promote love or self-giving”;
- “the fears associated with permanent commitment, the obsession with free time”;
- “treat[ing] affective relationships the way we treat material objects and the environment: everything is disposable; everyone uses and throws away, takes and breaks”;
- “older adults reject[ing] the ideal of growing old together, looking after and supporting one another”;
- “a culture which pressures young people not to start a family, because they lack possibilities for the future”
- “young persons postpon[ing] a wedding for economic reasons”;
- “spread of pornography and the commercialization of the body, fostered also by a misuse of the internet”;
- “Marital problems [being] often confronted in haste and without the courage to have patience and reflect, to make sacrifices and to forgive one another”;
- “consumerism deter[ring] people from having children, simply so they can maintain a certain freedom and life-style”;
- “the weakening of faith and religious practice in some societies [having] an effect on families, leaving them more isolated amid their difficulties”;
- “the lack of dignified or affordable housing lead[ing] to the postponement of formal relationships. ... Families and homes go together.”

- “families suffer[ing] from problems related to work, where young people have few possibilities and job offers are very selective and insecure. Workdays are long and oftentimes made more burdensome by extended periods away from home. This situation does not help family members to gather together or parents to be with their children in such a way as to nurture their relationships”;
- “a great number of children born outside of wedlock, many of whom subsequently grow up with just one of their parents or in a blended or reconstituted family”;
- “forced migration of families, resulting from situations of war, persecution, poverty and injustice, and marked by the vicissitudes of a journey that often puts lives at risk, traumatizes people and destabilizes families.”

The Pope’s list of concerns truly paints a picture of the uphill struggle that many have to face as they try to bring up their family in a moral and God-loving way in the midst of a society with many ills. But the heart, it seems to me, of this chapter by the Pope is this passage, in which he reminds us that the Church’s teaching is perennially good, and something that we need to keep presenting in all its wonder and blessing:

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.— A.L. n. 35.

We know that God will always send His Spirit upon us when we ask Him in fervent prayer; so today, Pentecost, is a great day when we can pray in a concerted way for our parish families, especially any families experiencing great difficulties: may the Spirit of light, of peace, of power, and of strength, give our families the grace they need to grow together in the love of Christ and the love of one another. The Pope ends this chapter with a word of encouragement:

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. ... “the Church is conscious of the need to offer a word of truth and hope ... The great values of marriage and the Christian family correspond to a yearning that is part and parcel of human existence”. — A.L. n. 57