

11th Sunday (C)

12th June 2016

Amoris Laetitia ch. 5

2Sam 12: *David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord."* Ps 31: *Happy the man whose offence is forgiven, whose sin is remitted* Gal 2: *I live ... with the life of Christ who lives in me* Lk 7: 36–50: *her many sins must have been forgiven her, or she would not have shown such great love.*

We've been looking over the past few weeks at the Pope's substantial new document, *Amoris Laetitia*, about Christian love in Marriage and the Family. In this next chapter, chapter 5, Pope Francis treats the beautiful subject of children — he calls this chapter, "Love Made Fruitful" ... children conceived at the heart of Christian marriage are indeed a blessed fruit, good in themselves, whatever the circumstances. The Pope is first at pains to emphasize the unique goodness of each and every child conceived:

"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."
(A.L. 168)

And he has strong words regarding the rejection of children, or the claim that some unborn children may be considered "unwanted":

"From the first moments of their lives, many children are rejected, abandoned, and robbed of their childhood and

future. There are those who dare to say, as if to justify themselves, that it was a mistake to bring these children into the world. This is shameful! ... If a child comes into this world in unwanted circumstances, the parents and other members of the family must do everything possible to accept that child as a gift from God and assume the responsibility of accepting him or her with openness and affection." (A.L. 166)

In fact, the Pope repeats such teaching several times in this chapter in different ways, stating that the love of parents for a child — any and every child — has to express the love of God for that child, unconditional acceptance.

In powerful passages, the Pope then goes on to extol the roles of Christian mothers and fathers, in their unique vocations for their children. As for mothers, he says:

"We cannot ignore the need that children have for a mother's presence, especially in the first months of life. ... The weakening of this maternal presence with its feminine qualities poses a grave risk to our world. I certainly value feminism, but one that does not demand uniformity or negate motherhood. ... The specifically feminine abilities — motherhood in particular — also grant duties, because womanhood also entails a specific mission in this world."
(A.L. 173).

And he has beautiful and strong words also for fathers, that they take up their masculine role of fatherhood with great dignity and commitment; not to be 'absent' fathers, or fathers who do not exercise due control and care for their

children. The Pope says this:

“God sets the father in the family so that by the gifts of his masculinity he can be close to his wife and share everything, joy and sorrow, hope and hardship. And to be close to his children as they grow ... To be a father who is always present. ... The fact is that children need to find a father waiting for them when they return home with their problems.” (A.L. 177).

The Pope emphasizes that parents have a key role and responsibility in bringing their children to Baptism, and also to teach them to pray, and to come to know and love the Mass: these are crucial actions of Christian parents in their God-given calling as mothers and fathers.

Pope Francis also has words of comfort and encouragement to those who find themselves unable to conceive children, for whatever reason. Whilst the Church does not permit artificial baby creation such as IVF — because it involves the deaths of countless embryos discarded in the process — yet there are other opportunities of helping a natural conception, and the Church promotes these. The Pope speaks lovingly of the generosity of parents who adopt children, or provide foster care:

“Adoption is a very generous way to become parents. I

encourage those who cannot have children to expand their marital love to embrace those who lack a proper family situation. They will never regret having been generous. Adopting a child is an act of love, offering the gift of a family to someone who has none.” (A.L. 179).

Pope Francis also speaks in this chapter of the care necessary for elderly parents, who must never be abandoned or neglected. The love in the extended family must be a manifest part of Christian living:

“The Church cannot and does not want to conform to a mentality of impatience, and much less of indifference and contempt, towards old age. We must reawaken the collective sense of gratitude, of appreciation, of hospitality, which makes the elderly feel like a living part of the community.” (A.L. 191)

In a final and moving section, Pope Francis with characteristic compassion sees the wider family as expressing that support that we need as frail human beings.

This should be what we live up to as Christians:

“This larger family should provide love and support to teenage mothers, children without parents, single mothers left to raise children, persons with disabilities needing particular affection and closeness, young people struggling with addiction, the unmarried, separated or widowed who are alone, and the elderly and infirm who lack the support of their children. It should also embrace “even those who have made shipwreck of their lives.” (A.L. 197)