

14th Sunday (C)

3rd July 2016

Amoris Laetitia, ch. 8

Is 66: *as one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you.*

Ps 65: *Come and hear, all who fear God. I will tell what he did for my soul.*

Gal 6: *what matters is for him to become an altogether new creature.*

Lk 10:1–12, 17–20: *take no purse, no haversack, no sandals ...* (shorter version)

The Gospel passage for this Sunday presents the great mission of the wider group of Jesus’s disciples (“the 72”) who go off to preach in all the surrounding villages, and to persevere in the task that the Lord gave them. It’s a demanding work, requiring constant effort, but the disciples are encouraged by the welcome that they received, and the faith that they have strengthened in those who listened. It reminds us that in our own day, we need to keep at the task of sowing the seeds of the Gospel — it doesn’t do itself, and it’s not a task that’s ever finished. We can’t sit back and reckon that we’ve done all we need to. The Pope displays this attitude and is tireless in preaching the message ...

We are coming towards the end, now, of our reflections on Pope Francis’s recent document on Marriage & Family Life, *Amoris Laetitia*, and in this penultimate chapter he tackles some tricky issues with regard to those Catholics who fall short of the ideal expected of them in

regard to Marriage. The Pope sets out what God calls us to:

“in no way must the Church desist from proposing the full ideal of marriage, God’s plan in all its grandeur: young people who are baptized should be encouraged to understand that the sacrament of marriage can enrich their prospects of love and that they can be sustained by the grace of Christ in the sacrament and by the possibility of participating fully in the life of the Church.” (A.L. 307)

Strengthening and supporting marriages is of the highest priority, but Pope Francis also accepts that not everyone has, for a variety of reasons, lived up to the ideal, and they need to be helped to live their lives, still, in the Church:

“Illumined by the gaze of Jesus Christ, [the Church] turns with love to those who participate in her life in an incomplete manner, recognizing that the grace of God works also in their lives by giving them the courage to do good, to care for one another in love and to be of service to the community in which they live and work.” (A.L. 291)

The Pope urges priests, who have that regular contact with their people, to adopt a ‘logic of pastoral mercy,’ and make sure that they treat each individual situation with the attention it needs. He urges us not to try and simply apply general rules without listening to the individual case, and to use this Holy Year of Mercy to reach out to those who are in ‘irregular’ marital situations and to assist them, wherever

possible, towards celebrating the Sacrament of Marriage. As I promised a few weeks ago — in keeping with this urgent call of Pope Francis — I wrote to many families in the parish to offer my time and spiritual assistance in meeting them and exploring ways of moving towards Marriage. This is what the Pope says:

“As for the way of dealing with different ‘irregular’ situations, the Synod Fathers reached a general consensus, which I support: ‘In considering a pastoral approach towards people who have contracted a civil marriage, who are divorced and remarried, or simply living together, the Church has the responsibility of helping them understand the divine pedagogy of grace in their lives and offering them assistance so they can reach the fullness of God’s plan for them,’ something which is always possible by the power of the Holy Spirit.” (A.L. 297)

Obviously, the thorniest issue is where there has been a civil ‘re-marriage’ whilst a valid sacramental marriage is still in existence. The Pope offers a balanced teaching, so whilst insisting that nothing can undo a validly contracted marriage, he wants those who have r-married outside the Church not to feel excluded, even if for the time being they cannot receive Holy Communion. Here’s what he says:

“No one can be condemned for ever, because that is not the logic of the Gospel! Here I am not speaking only of the

divorced and remarried, but of everyone, in whatever situation they find themselves. Naturally, if someone flaunts an objective sin as if it were part of the Christian ideal, or wants to impose something other than what the Church teaches, he or she can in no way presume to teach or preach to others; ... Such a person needs to listen once more to the Gospel message and its call to conversion. Yet even for that person there can be some way of taking part in the life of community.” (A.L. 297)

But the Pope’s constant refrain is that each and every situation needs to be listened to; each and every couple and family in their difficulties needs to be encouraged by the Church and her ministers to lead to a life of greatest possible conformity to Jesus.

So, I offer once again, to those who are living as if married, but are not married yet in the Church: come to see me, in confidence, and let’s see what can be done. No two cases are the same, and don’t rely on hearsay as to whether your situation can or can’t be resolved. There are plenty of parishioners here who have been able to get married after all who thought that they never could be. Let’s pray for one another and heed the Pope’s call to accompany and discern, and to promote the beauty of married love and life in Christ.