

15th Sunday (C)

10th July 2016

Amoris Laetitia, ch. 9

Dt 30: *the Word is very near to you for your observance.*

Ps 68: *Seek the Lord, you who are poor, and your hearts will revive.*

Col 1: *all things were created through Him and for Him.*

Lk 10:25–37: The Good Samaritan

The Holy Year of Mercy called by Pope Francis for this year 2016 has fortuitously — or maybe by design — been arranged in the year (“year C”) when we read mostly the Gospel of St Luke ... And that’s because St Luke’s Gospel contains all those beautiful and powerful parables of mercy. In the middle of Lent, at the very heart of the Holy Year’s sweep from Dec 2015 to Nov 2016, we heard the parable of the Father’s deep, life-changing forgiveness, commonly known as ‘The Prodigal Son.’ But there are others in Luke, no less powerful, such as today’s parable, ‘The Good Samaritan.’ In this famous account, our Lord teaches us, by His very own example of stooping down to save mankind from his Fall into sin, of what it mean to be a true neighbour to another. And it’s in the family, of course, that we learn first what it means to “love thy neighbour.”

In the 9th and final chapter of his teaching document, *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis addresses the “Spirituality of

the Family,” for he wants each and every Catholic family to be deepening their spirituality, their love for the Lord lived out in the daily little sacrifices of family life. He says this:

“The Lord’s presence dwells in real and concrete families, with all their daily troubles and struggles, joys and hopes. Living in a family makes it hard for us to feign or lie; we cannot hide behind a mask. If that authenticity is inspired by love, then the Lord reigns there, with his joy and his peace. The spirituality of family love is made up of thousands of small but real gestures.” (A.L. 315)

We mustn’t think, says the Pope, that growth in the spiritual life is something other than our family life: it is precisely through the daily, sometimes arduous, commitments to our families, that we make our offering to God. He urges us again to see that ...

“A positive experience of family communion is a true path to daily sanctification and mystical growth, a means for deeper union with God. ... Hence, those who have deep spiritual aspirations should not feel that the family detracts from their growth in the life of the Spirit, but rather see it as a path which the Lord is using to lead them to the heights of mystical union.” (A.L. 316)

This is very important: our family life isn’t something different from our life of faith: they shouldn’t be at odds, but the two interwoven: (i) the faith helping cope with the

demands of the family; and (ii) the huge gift of the family becoming a great blessing for which one gives thanks to God, and leads one to God.

Facing difficulties, the Holy Father says, is a particularly acute way of uniting our family with the experience of Christ:

“Moments of pain and difficulty will be experienced in union with the Lord’s cross, and his closeness will make it possible to surmount them. ... Gradually, with the grace of the Holy Spirit, [the spouses] grow in holiness through married life, also by sharing in the mystery of Christ’s cross, which transforms difficulties and sufferings into an offering of love.” (A.L. 317)

On the other hand ...

“Moments of joy, relaxation, celebration, and even sexuality can be experienced as a sharing in the full life of the resurrection. ” (A.L. 317)

Seen in this light — in the light of Easter — the good things of life, the good things in the family, are great blessings and joys that come from God, and for which we should return often, again and again, in prayer and thanksgiving. Let’s never forget to give God thanks for the blessings of our families, those who have conceived us — given us life — and given us our upbringing, even if it was far from perfect.

In an extended section, Pope Francis once again reminds us that family prayer must be the centre of our family life, and that it makes all the difference!

“A few minutes can be found each day to come together before the living God, to tell him our worries, to ask for the needs of our family, to pray for someone experiencing difficulty, to ask for help in showing love, to give thanks for life and for its blessings, and to ask Our Lady to protect us beneath her maternal mantle. With a few simple words, this moment of prayer can do immense good for our families. ... The family’s communal journey of prayer culminates by sharing together in the Eucharist, especially in the context of the Sunday rest. ... For the food of the Eucharist offers the spouses the strength and incentive needed to live the marriage covenant each day as a ‘domestic church’.” (A.L. 318)

At the very end of this long, and rich, document, Pope Francis reiterates that he doesn’t expect perfection; he realizes that we are all “on the way” and as yet far from perfected. But he does want us to try and measure up our families against the high calling of our Baptism, and God’s plan for the truly Christian family. He ends thus:

“No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed; families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love. This is a never- ending vocation born of the full communion of the Trinity, the profound unity between Christ and his Church, the loving community which is the Holy Family of Nazareth, and the pure fraternity existing among the saints of heaven.” (A.L. 325)