

A study of *Amoris Laetitia*

Chapter 4 (§89 to §164)

Chapter 4 of *Amoris Laetitia* treats love in marriage which it illuminates with Saint Paul's *Hymn to Love* in 1 *Corinthians* 13:4-7. The opening section is truly a painstaking, focused, inspired and poetic exegesis of the Pauline text. It is a collection of brief passages carefully and tenderly describing human love in absolute concrete terms. The quality of psychological introspection that marks this exegesis is striking. The psychological insights enter into the emotional world of the spouses – positive and negative – as well as the erotic dimension of love. This is an extremely rich and valuable contribution to Christian married life—unprecedented in previous papal documents.

This section digresses briefly from the more extensive, perceptive treatment of the day-to-day experience of married love whereby the Pope refuses to judge against ideal standards:

“There is no need to lay upon two limited persons the tremendous burden of having to reproduce perfectly the union existing between Christ and his Church, for marriage as a sign entails dynamic process..., one which advances gradually with the progressive integration of the gifts of God.” (AL 122)

On the other hand, the Pope forcefully stresses the fact that conjugal love by its very nature defines the partners in a richly encompassing and lasting union (AL 123), precisely within that “mixture of enjoyment and struggles, tensions and repose, pain and relief, satisfactions and longings, annoyances and pleasures” (AL 126) which indeed make up a marriage.

The chapter concludes with a very important reflection on the “transformation of love” because “Longer life spans now mean that close and exclusive relationships must last for four, five or even six decades; consequently, the initial decision has to be frequently renewed” (AL 163). As physical appearance alters, the loving attraction does not lessen but changes as sexual desire can be transformed over time into the desire for togetherness and mutuality:

“There is no guarantee that we will feel the same way all through life. Yet if a couple can come up with a shared and lasting life project, they can love one another and live as one until death do them part, enjoying an enriching intimacy” (AL 163).

I. Scriptural Reflections and Pastoral Implications

Love broken - LOVE repaired

FIRST CORINTHIANS 14:4-7

The *Exhortation*, aptly named *the Joy of Love*, contains over 250 references to God’s holy words. Unlike many ecclesial documents in our history, where sentences are culled to establish or support a doctrinal teaching, Pope Francis appeals to Scripture as to loving and merciful words of a wise Father who counsels those who would listen and who seek to live in accord with the mind and heart of a creative God. Counsel and compassion, perception and wisdom, longing and loving are at the heart of all that is and must be said about human experience, and so of the human experience of married life.

By placing his exposition of St Paul’s hymn to love divine, all love’s excelling, Pope Francis has set his thoughts in a context. The context is: the chapters which have gone before—the impulse of which must be digested—just as the twelve chapters of First Corinthians must be understood before a song of love can be heard and understood.

THE CONTEXT INTO WHICH FRANCIS SPEAKS

Chapter One reminds the Church, where it needs reminding, that not only the Bible, but the whole world “is full of families, births, love stories and family crises” (AL 8). Thus, we are called to meditate on how the family is not an abstract ideal but a reality carried out with tenderness but, alas, scarred with sin. It therefore follows that the Word of God “is not a series of abstract ideas but rather a source of comfort and companionship for every family that experiences difficulties or suffering” (AL 22).

Chapter Two, drawing on the final Reports of the two Synods, considers the realities of families today and the challenges from a variety of cultural ideologies. Pope Francis insists that, “we would do well to focus on concrete realities, since the call and the demands of the Spirit resound in the events of history” (AL 31). It is through listening to the Spirit and to the world in its depressing vagaries that we will come to understand the needs of the present.¹ Above all, confronting realities will safeguard pastors from “a far too abstract and almost artificial theological ideal of marriage, far removed from the concrete situations and practical possibilities of real families” (AL 36). It is unrealistic to imagine that families can sustain themselves “simply by stressing doctrinal, bioethical and moral issues, without encouraging openness to grace” (AL 37).

¹ For much of this chapter, Pope Francis is reliant on *Familiaris consortio*.

Chapter Three, in thirty paragraphs, depicts the vocation of the family according to Gospel values and Church affirmation.² The essential elements of the Church’s teaching on marriage and the family are clearly stated in the context of “imperfect situations” of “wounded families”. While general principles must be adhered to, pastors are obliged to exercise true and careful discernment, taking into account the complexity of various situations and alert and attentive to “how people experience and endure distress because of their condition” (AL 79).

CHAPTER FOUR

Fittingly, having outlined all that confronts the Church and its pastoral responsibilities in the face of the diverse and complex situations presented in our time and place, Pope Francis, in what is the fulcrum of *Amoris Laetitia*, turns to God’s holy words, using the phrase of Francis of Assisi, to find divine counsel.

His intent is clear:

All that has been said so far would be insufficient to express the Gospel of marriage and the family, were we not also to speak of love. For we cannot encourage a path of fidelity and mutual self-giving without encouraging the growth, strengthening and deepening of conjugal and family love. Indeed, the grace of the sacrament of marriage is intended before all else to perfect the couple’s love. (AL 89)

The Corinthian text is familiar to Christian couples who have pledged their love in “the presence of God and this congregation”:

Love is patient,
love is kind;
love is not jealous or boastful;
it is not arrogant or rude.
Love does not insist on its own way,
it is not irritable or resentful;
it does not rejoice at wrong-doing
but rejoices in the right.
Love bears all things,
believes all things,
hopes all things,
endures all things.
1 Cor 13:4-7

² The sources here are *Gaudium et Spes*, *Humanae Vitae*, and *Familiaris consortio*, thus illustrating that Pope Francis is building on what has gone before in order to identify pastoral imperatives for the future.

Some brief observations

That Pope Francis relies on God's holy words to explicate primarily the depth of the riches of God, and then to see those riches incarnated in human loving is clear in his understanding of Paul's pastoral strategy. Paul always begins with God and then enfolds humanity in God's loving care. That is what Pope Francis does in his explication of love.

Love is patient

Since the sacrament is divine and thus permanent sustenance, first that love which is patient is God's love. The Greek sentence is Ἡ ἀγάπη μακροθυμεῖ (*hē agape makrothumei*) and, in our Scriptures, it refers to God's patience as a manifestation of that steadfast love which endures forever. God proclaims to Moses the very name of the LORD God:

The LORD descended in a cloud and stood before him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God of mercy and graciousness, *slow to anger* (*makrothumei*) and abounding in steadfast love, and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, and forgiving iniquity and transgression ...
Exodus 34:5-6

It is that kind of patience that Jonah learns is of the essence of God:

I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, *slow to anger*, and abounding in steadfast love...
Jonah 4:2

Where the anger of the LORD is stirred, it is always redemptive, always seeking to mend, to heal, to redress wrong. The patience of the LORD is a manifestation of that very steadfast love, of that *hesed*, which everywhere defines the very nature of God. Psalm 136 sings of God's steadfast love. Twenty-six times its refrain sings of that *hesed*, that love which, of all loves, alone endures forever. Psalm 136 is a psalm for slow learners. That is the patience of which Paul sings, the patience and long-suffering of God by the grace of the sacrament glowing in human hearts when two become one flesh.

Love is kind

Love is χρηστεύεται (*chrēsteuetai*), the only time the word occurs in the Bible. It speaks of that goodness of heart that issues in kindness. It is a word used in Greek to express what we would mean when we say "She has a warm heart, she's a good-natured woman". Again, kindness expresses, not merely the actions, but the very nature of the one who always speaks and acts from the heart. It is that kind of goodness that is always at the service of others, always available where only kindness will serve. It is that kindness which must suffuse every pastoral initiative, else pastoral initiatives will be as a noisy gong, a clanging cymbal, signifying nothing. The words of Ephesians are echoed in Paul's "love is kind":

Be kind (*chrēstos*) to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you.

Ephesians 4:5

Love is not jealous

Love is not jealous, (οὐ ζηλοῦ ἡ ἀγάπη; *ou zēloi hē agape*). The words *jealous*, *envious*, come to mind as demeaning in human affairs. It is the feeling which poisoned Joseph's brothers and prompted murderous thoughts and resulted in slavery (Genesis 37:11-34). Where God is jealous it is in protection of his very being, of his holy name (Ezekiel 39:25). It is for God an expression of protective love (Zechariah 1:14; 8:2). In the human heart it seeks to destroy that which is good (Acts 17:5).

Nor boastful

The word boastful (περπερεύεται, *perpereuetai*) reminds one of the Pharisee who went to pray but instead sang his own praises (Luke 18:9-14). Such people who think themselves to stand must beware lest they fall:

The boastful shall not stand before your eyes...

Psalms 5:5

I say to the boastful, 'Do not boast,'
and to the wicked, 'Do not lift up your horn';
Do not lift up your horn on high,
or speak with a haughty neck.

Psalms 75:4-5

That is, do not blow your own trumpet. Boastfulness lacks that humility which gives God the glory. When St Paul boasts it is in the LORD:

Let the one who boasts, boast in the LORD. For it is not the one who commends himself who is approved but the one whom the LORD commends.

2 Corinthians 10:17-18

Love is not arrogant or rude

Blowing one's own trumpet is a form of arrogance for it heaps praise on one's own virtues, forgetting the source of all goodness, the *fons et origo* of *all that is within me*, which should speak of the glory of God and of the steadfast love which everyday is poured out and sustains. Arrogance is a claim to power, to self-importance that overrides consideration of the merits of others. It is so full of its own importance that it seeks to diminish, not to build up. Among the Gentiles are those who lord it over people. But says Jesus,

It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave,

even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many. *Matthew 20:26-28*

Nor shall rudeness disfigure the language of love: οὐκ ἀσχημονεῖ (*ouk aschēmonei, do not be rude*). The root of this verb speaks of deformity, of an ugliness which the Latin conveys in *turpis*, a turpitude which manifests ugliness, deformity, unsightliness, dis-gracefulness. Again, what is on display is oneself and such self display is perceived not as virtue but as base metal.

Love does not insist on its own way

Love does not display its own interests. It does not speak of self (οὐ ζητεῖ τὰ ἑαυτῆς, *ou zētei ta heautēs, does not seek its own interests*). The arrogant, the selfish, the self-absorbed have no concept of the other, no thanks and humility when offered love, no compassion where mercy alone will do. Jesus stretches out his hand to touch, to embrace, to heal, never arrogantly to chastise, to humiliate, to dishonour.

It is not irritable or resentful

The basis of the word translated “irritable” (παροξύνεται, *paroxunetai*) is sharpness, as the point of a spur (it comes into English as *paroxysm*, a darting stab of pain). As Shylock protested, if you prick us do we not bleed. What is decried here is not a passing flash of anger but a disposition, a set characteristic that seeks to unsettle, to irritate, to provoke. For in shows itself in resentment, in brooding over imagined wrongs (λογίζεται τὸ κακόν, *logizetai to kakon, reckon evil things, calculating wrongs, registering imagined hurts, resenting what belongs to the other*). To resent the capacity for good in others is to condemn oneself to brooding, the very basis of the Greek here, on imagined slights and, not only empties one’s heart of the joy of giving but dulls the capacity to receive with thankful heart.

It does not rejoice at wrong-doing

Paul letter to his beloved Christians in the town of Philippi, though he may have penned his words in prison, is full of joy. His prayer for “all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi” is “my prayer with joy” because “of your togetherness in the gospel” (ἐπὶ τῇ κοινωνίᾳ ὑμῶν εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον, *epi tē koinōnia eis euaggelion*).³ He urges his beloved who are dear to his heart to rejoice:

Rejoice in the LORD always; again I say rejoice! *Philippians 4:4*

It is, therefore, against all that God stands for, against all that Christian fellowship demands, to rejoice at wrong-doing. The test of togetherness in the LORD is this:

Whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is beautiful, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is

³ It is difficult to find an exact English word for Paul’s *koinōnia*. It expresses that kind of unity which comes from being in Christ, a unity which suffuses all who are baptized and who live with one mind and spirit rejoicing in God “our Saviour”.

anything worthy of praise, think on these things ... practise these things, and the God of peace will be with you. *Philippians 4:8-9*

But rejoices in the truth

Paul, in his admonition that love must rejoice in the right makes a slight change which is significant. He says plainly that love does not rejoice (χαίρει, *chairei*) in wrong-doing but then changes the verb slightly with a particular nuance. For συγχαίρει, *sug-chairei*, suggests “to take part in another’s joy”. Paul is suggesting that true love is passion shared. It is a fellowship, a *koinōnia* in rejoicing. Above all, to share the truth of the gospel is to embrace that freedom “that we have in Christ Jesus” (see *Galatians 2:4-5*). Again, Paul roots love in a community which has a passion for truth, the very essence of the gospel of God.

Love bears all things

There is a delightful ambiguity in Paul’s “love bears all things”. Here Paul moves from “Love is not ...” to “love is...”. The first positive is πάντα στέγει (*panta stegei*), *love bears all things*. The verb has a delightful ambiguity. It means “to keep out the rain”, “to cover in order to fend off the rain”. So love wards off all that would dampen love. But it can also mean “to sustain”, “to endure”, “to support”. Love, therefore, not only wards off all that is inimical to love but it sustains and supports all that protects, all that fosters growth. There is a song: *Love Is All You Need*. Very Pauline.

Believes all things

Paul is not suggesting that love is soft and believes whatever comes along. For all love embraces all that God gives. Believing is above all believing in the gospel. There must be “no obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ” (1 Cor 9:12); “the word of truth, the gospel which has come to you” (*Colossians 1:5-6*) is “the gospel of God” (1 *Thessalonians 2:2*), “the gospel of Christ” (1 *Thessalonians 3:2*); indeed, it is “the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 *Thessalonians 1:8*). When Paul urges that love believes all things, he means that all that comes from God is good news, is gospel, and is to be embraced with welcome and to suffuse everything with the glow of love.

Hopes all things

In the seven authentic letters of St Paul the word hope occurs thirty-seven times and as many again in the rest of the Pauline corpus. It is everywhere a noun, except here where Paul uses the verb. Again, hope is founded in God, in the gospel. Quite plainly, “we rejoice in hope of the glory of God” (*Romans 5:2*). “Hope does not put us to shame because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us: (*Romans 5:5*). Or, to express the matter in very human terms, G. K. Chesterton remarked that when you fall in love, it is forever, even if it only lasts a month.

Endures all things

The Old Testament is often called the Book of the Covenant in recognition of the covenant instituted by God on Mount Sinai. But such a name, while calling attention to the revelation of God's name, to the assurance of God's abiding presence, indeed, to all that is embraced in God's promise: *I will be your God and you shall be my people*, is hardly the heart of the matter. For the Hebrew Bible is an account of covenants broken and covenants repaired. It is a record of failure and redress, of disobedience, forgiveness, reconciliation, and renewal. It a portrait of a God who constantly pursues a recalcitrant, stiff-necked people, who are called to be pilgrims and insist on being wanderers. It is, therefore, a story of broken love and repaired love. It is a glorious story of the extent to which a God whose love is steadfast will go that these people be my people.

So it is God who endures all things. It is God who must dismiss failing kings, a God who must himself "shepherd my people Israel" (Ezekiel 34), who must bear the sins of the world, a God who chastises but never turns his back on his own. If human beings are to love, then they must endure all things that vitiate love. They must strive for that steadfastness which characterises the only love that lasts. It is a startling thought that the divine paradigm for love's endurance is the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, the empty tomb is the triumph of endurance.

The reality, the tragedy, is that we are vessels of clay. God's love is poured into earthen vessels. On that Pope Francis insists. He reminds those who have forgotten that we are earthen vessels, not yet perfected into eternal glory. What we receive from God, the grace to be human, is treasure indeed—

But we have this treasure in vessels of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed ...

2 Corinthians 4:7-9

We endure in faith, in hope, in love, in all things, believing that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

That, says Pope Francis, is all we know and all we need to know.

THE CONTEXT OF CHAPTER FOUR

That the Pope's exposition of the Corinthian text can, and, indeed, must form the framework and supply the content of much that needs to be explored by loving couples who seek to stand before God, and before God's people, to affirm that love is, indeed, the greatest of all gifts. The exploration of Love in Marriage (§89-§164) is necessary,

For we cannot encourage a path of fidelity and mutual self-giving without encouraging the growth, strengthening, and deepening of conjugal and family love.⁴

⁴ §89, quoting the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1641.

It is instructive to note that the Pope follows closely the method of St Paul. The Apostle addresses “those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints” (1 Corinthians 1:2) and he gives thanks to God because the grace of God was given in Christ Jesus “so that in every way you were enriched in him ... not lacking any spiritual gifts” (1:5). Thus recognising the indelible dignity before God, Paul can turn to the problems endemic in his difficult Corinthian parishes. Paul, as does Francis, outlines all that must be mended, all that must be put right. As Paul is caught up in many difficulties in Ephesus, he has heard from Chloe’s people (1:11) of all that is amiss among his Corinthian churches. He has listened to the pain of the people, the errors of their ways, the divisions among them, their perplexities, their uncertainties, their worries, their frailties, to all that is contrary to “the mind of the LORD” (2:16).

In other words, Paul familiarises himself with the detail, with the persons, with the causes, of all that is amiss. The first apostolic act, the first initiative of this best of all pastors, is to listen. Only when he knows what is amiss does he offer the balm of understanding, of sympathy, of counsel.

There are 97 questions in 1 Corinthians. Many are rhetorical; all are informative. Paul, contrary to many estimations, does not insist on his own way. Questions denote sharing, exchanging views, evaluating solutions, of weighing the pros and cons. Thus, by first listening, by first hearing the pain of the people, their concerns and their dilemmas, does he counsel in the name of God “as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God” (4:1)

*Ring the bell
Call the people,
Listen*

Pope Francis has written an Exhortation. That is, he exhorts the Churches to listen to his words, earnestly to attend to his pastoral voice. That is what Paul did. That is what Francis commends in our time and in our place. Before we seek to counsel, we must have the experience of listening to what is amiss. Pastors, before reading the Pope’s or any other exhortations to the people, must listen and learn. We must give people opportunities to speak their hurt, to express their pain, to weep in their brokenness. To hear great-grandmothers, grandmothers, fathers and mothers, pour out in sorrow what has happened to their children, is to begin to understand why and where healing must be done. How many times do we hear these words:

What do you want me to do for you?
Mark 10:51

And how many times did we hear the plea:

Have mercy on me!
Mark 10:47

We are transfigured by listening.

II. Canonical Implications

Chapter 4 is the heart of Pope Francis' teaching on marriage and the family. The most eye-catching aspect of this chapter, the longest in the Exhortation, is his lengthy commentary on the 'hymn to love' incorporated by St. Paul into his First Letter to the Corinthians and extensively referred to by Fr Joseph O'Hanlon in the homiletical and pastoral strand of this study (see Section I). Less obvious perhaps, but no less important, are the comments the Holy Father makes later in the chapter on the importance of love growing, being transformed, renewed day after day for decades, and no less real at the end of conjugal life—despite being expressed and experienced in entirely different ways—from the love exchanged on the wedding day.

The same is true, of course, of the way that the teaching of the Church is expressed. The Holy Father quotes his saintly predecessor, Pope John Paul II:

“emotion, caused by another human person as a person...does not *per se* tend towards the conjugal act”, and Pope emeritus Benedict: love “is a single reality, but with different dimensions; at different times, one or other dimension may emerge more clearly.” (AL n 164)

The difference between these expressions and the description (almost definition) of marriage given in the old canonical textbooks could scarcely be sharper.

“Marriage is a lawful and exclusive contract by which a man and a woman mutually give and accept a right over their bodies for the purpose of acts which are in themselves suitable for the generation of children.” (see Bouscaren and Ellis: *Canon Law: A Text and Commentary*, 3rd edition, Milwaukee 1957, p 447)

The authors comment on the primary and secondary aims of marriage (canon 1013): The primary purpose is the procreation and education of children, and the secondary purpose is mutual help and allaying concupiscence; quoting the Holy Office on 1st April (no, really) 1944 as condemning the view that these purposes could be equal or even reversed (page 448).

Ayrinhac is, if anything, even more brutal: “Marriage is a contract by which a man and woman become irrevocably united for the procreation and education of children.” (*Marriage Legislation in the New Code of Canon Law*, 2nd edition, New York 1946)

Augustine (*A Commentary on Canon Law* vol 5, Herder 1919) adds that the secondary purposes, mutual help and allaying concupiscence, 'are entirely subordinate to' the procreation and education of children (p 16).

It is salutary to remember that Bouscaren and Ellis were writing less than ten years before the promulgation, at the Second Vatican Council, of *Gaudium et Spes*, proclaiming a very different understanding of marriage (nn 48ff).

Yet the teaching of the Council Fathers did not arise suddenly within those few years. It can be found in earlier official documents of the Church such as the *Roman Catechism* of 1566 which taught that the primary reason for marriage was the community of man and woman for the purpose of mutual help, so that they may more easily bear the difficulties of life, and especially those of old age. Similar points were made in the papal encyclical *Casti Connubii* of Pope Pius XI (see W Kasper: *Theology of Christian Marriage* p 13).

No doubt the officials of the Holy Office in 1944 (whose opinion was specifically endorsed by Pope Pius XII) would assert that they were merely restating the constant teaching of the Church. Yet the Church's teaching had been neither constant nor unbroken and the Council Fathers, acting in union with the Holy Father Pope Paul VI, gave explicit statements of the Church's official teaching which has now been given legal effect in the 1983 Code of Canon Law. We now find marriage defined as a covenant, rather than as a contract; as a 'partnership of their whole life' established by the man and woman; and that its purpose is the well-being of the spouses and the procreation and upbringing of children. (canon 1055)

This purpose is not divided into primary and secondary categories. However, learned canonists have reflected that the wellbeing of the spouses is mentioned first in the canon because it is the context into which children are to be born and reared. In this sense, the wellbeing of the spouses comes first.

Learned canonists have also asked themselves what could be implied, legally, by the phrase 'the wellbeing of the spouses' and have concluded that it should be interpreted as containing the following six characteristics, marking a progression – each of them contains implicitly all the earlier elements.

The six characteristics they have identified are:

- Partnership
- Benevolence
- Companionship
- Friendship
- Caring
- Marital love.

And it is to **a reflection on marital love** that Pope Francis has devoted his longest and most important chapter in *Amoris Laetitia*.

III. Questions for reflection and/or discussion

Love in marriage

The Holy Father says that we cannot express the Gospel of marriage and family without speaking of love. His meditation of St. Paul's hymn to love is part exhortation, part examination of conscience. He speaks of the joy and passion of married love as well as the dark side involving violence and manipulation in sex.

- *What part of his meditation on Paul's hymn to love moved you most (90-119)?*

How could clergy and parish community **respond to people in less-than-ideal family situations**? Do we respond with judgment, criticism, and/or exclusion, or do we welcome them and accompany them in the messiness of real life?

- *Pope Francis says we become impatient "whenever we think that relationships or people ought to be perfect, or when we put ourselves at the center and expect things to turn out our way" (92). Is this your experience?*

How can we, as clergy, better **support people in making a life-long commitment** to a passionate union that is outward-facing without expecting perfection of them?

- *"Love does not have to be perfect to be valued. Couples love one another as best they can, with all their limits, but the fact that love is imperfect does not mean that it is untrue or unreal" (113). Is imperfect love enough to hold a marriage together?*
- *What does Francis mean by "trust enables a relationship to be free" (115)?*
- *How can you be more **merciful like the Father** in offering understanding, comfort, and support for married couples who you know are struggling?*

How do we (clergy and parish) **support couples in more practical ways** as they prepare for marriage and live through the first few vulnerable years of marriage together?

- Pope Francis quotes St. Ignatius of Loyola who said, "Love is shown more by deeds than by words" (94). Do you agree? Explore how you might include this when preparing couples for marriage?
- "Loving ourselves is only important as a psychological prerequisite for being able to love others" (101). How do you explain this when preparing couples for marriage?

Discuss some factors that couples might be experiencing that lead to the lack of **proper intimacy and connection**. (Pope Francis mentions the exhaustion of work, distraction of electronic devices, and over scheduling of activities as some examples.)

- Explore what might be some realistic antidotes to the above stressors?
- Pope Francis speaks of the passion, joy, and beauty of marriage (125-130, 142-152). For a celibate priest, does he get it right? What rings true? What doesn't?
- Is Pope Francis realistic in his description of violence and manipulation in sex (153-157)?
- What do you think of the Holy Father's exegesis of St. Paul's women "be subject to your husbands" (156)?
- Reflecting on some elderly people you know, how do you think older couples feel about the Holy Father's treatment of love and aging (163-164)?
- "After the love that unites us to God, conjugal love is the greatest form of friendship," says Francis quoting St. Thomas Aquinas (123). Describe a couple you know who are truly friends.

Finally, what do you think of Francis' argument for "indissoluble exclusivity" in marriage (123-124)?

IV. Presentation Tools

1. Introducing the structure of the Apostolic exhortation:

- **Consists of approximately 53,000 words.** Suggest using a ‘word cloud’ from Google to identify prominent words found in the document as well as frequency.
- **326 paragraphs.**
- Divided into an **Introduction and nine chapters.**
- 366 footnoted citations.
- **Amoris Laetitia is a letter** addressed to the church.
- **It teaches and moves us to action:** it encourages us to implement recommendations from the document.

2. Presentation talking points:

- **Family and the Bible.** What does Scripture have to say about marriage and family?
- **The State of the Family.** There are many challenges facing families today that are important for us to understand.
- **The Ideal and Real Life.** Pope Francis wants us to embrace mercy when families are unable to reach ideals.
- **The Joy of Love & Marriage.** Marriage is a wonderful gift from God, but it is often a place of many challenges.
- **The Joy of Parenting.** Parents are the primary educators of their children. How can we best support them in preparing their children to be disciples in the world?
- **Next Steps.** What can our community do to respond to Pope Francis' call to action?

3. Papal Statements used:

- **The Light of Faith** (*Lumen Fidei*): June 2013, encyclical based on a draft by Pope Benedict XVI.
- **The Joy of the Gospel** (*Evangelii Gaudium*): November 2013, apostolic exhortation.
- **The Face of Mercy** (*Misericordiae Vultus*): April 2015, papal bull.
- **Praise Be to You** (*Laudato Si'*): June 2015, encyclical.
- **The Joy of Love** (*Amoris Laetitia*): March 2016, apostolic exhortation.

4. Church Statements used:

- **Vatican II** emphasized love and the role of Christ in the family. (¶67)
- **Blessed Pope Paul VI** wrote *Humanae Vitae* (Of Human Life) on married love and responsible parenthood. (¶68)
- **Saint John Paul II** also spoke extensively about these topics, especially in his Letter to Families (*Gratissimam Sane*) and On the Role of Christian Families in the World (*Familiaris Consortio*). (¶69)
- **Pope Benedict XVI** wrote about the nature of love and how it relates to marriage (*Deus Caritas Est, Caritas in Veritate*). (¶70)

5. Synods on the Family:

- *The Joy of Love* flowed from two “**Synod on the Family**” gatherings in Rome (in 2014 & 2015).
- The meetings had **hundreds of participants** from around the world, including bishops, priests, married couples, women, and leaders from other Christian denominations.
- Pope Francis quotes extensively from **Synod documents** in *The Joy of Love*.

6. Audience – who is it for?

- This document addresses **everyone in the Church**: bishops, priests, deacons, consecrated people (Religious), married couples, and all lay people.
- Pope Francis particularly focuses on **pastoral leaders** and **married people**.

NOTES