

Session 1: C (after Chapter One – slide 18): **Chapter 1 of *Amoris Laetitia***

1. What stood out for you in the vision of the human person and marriage found in God's word?
2. What do you think you can take with you from this reflection?
3. How can the Church better communicate this vision of marriage and family?

Excerpt of Chapter Four of Amoris Laetitia (#91-119)

Pope Francis' Reflections on the Practical Living of Love in the Family based on St. Paul's Description in 1 Cor 13:4-7

"Love is Patient" - (#91-92)

This refers to the quality of one who does not act on impulse and avoids giving offense. Being patient does not mean letting ourselves be constantly mistreated, tolerating physical aggression, or allowing other people to use us.

We encounter problems 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. Then everything makes us impatient, everything makes us react aggressively. Unless we cultivate patience, we will always find excuses for responding angrily. We will end up incapable of living together, antisocial, unable to control our impulses, and our families will become battlegrounds.

Patience takes root when I recognize that other people also have a right to live in this world, just as they are. It does not matter if they hold me back, if they unsettle my plans, or annoy me by the way they act or think, or if they are not everything I want them to be. Love always has an aspect of deep compassion that leads to accept the other person as part of this world, even when he or she acts differently than I would like.

"Love is Kind" ("is at the Service of Others) - (#93-94)

Paul wants to make it clear that patience is not a completely passive attitude, but one accompanied by activity, by a dynamic and creative interaction with others. The word indicates that love benefits and helps others. For this reason it is translated as "kind". Love is ever ready to be of assistance.

St. Ignatius of Loyola said: "Love is shown more by deeds than by words." It thus shows its fruitfulness and allows us to experience the happiness of giving, the nobility and grandeur of sending ourselves unstintingly, without asking to be repaid, purely for the pleasure of giving and serving.

"Love is Not Jealous" (#95-96)

Saint Paul goes on to reject as contrary to love an attitude expressed by the verb *zelói* – to be jealous or envious. This means that love has no room for discomfiture at another person's good fortune. Envy is a form of sadness provoked by another's prosperity; it shows that we are not concerned for the happiness of others but only with our own well-being. Whereas love makes us rise above ourselves, envy closes us in on ourselves. True love values the other person's achievements. It does not see him or her as a threat. It frees us from the sour taste of envy. It recognizes that everyone has different gifts and a unique path in life. So it strives to discover its own road to happiness, while allowing others to find theirs.

In a word, love means fulfilling the last two commandments of God's Law: "You shall not covet"... anything that belongs to another. Love inspires a sincere esteem for every human being and the recognition of his or her own right to happiness. I love this person, and I see him or her with the eyes of God. As a result, I feel a deep sense of happiness and peace.

"Love is Not Boastful - it is Not Arrogant" (#97-98)

Those who love not only refrain from speaking too much about themselves, but are focused on others; they do not need to be the center of attention. Similarly, love is not arrogant. Literally, it means that we do not become "puffed up" before others. It also points to something more subtle: an obsession with showing off and a loss of a sense of reality. Such people think that, because they are more "spiritual" or "wise", they are more important than they really are. Paul uses this verb on other occasions, as when he says that "knowledge puffs up", whereas "love builds up" (1 Cor 8:1). Some think that they are important because they are more knowledgeable than others; they want to lord it over them. Yet what really makes us important is a love that understands, shows concern, and embraces the weak

It is important for Christians to show their love by the way they treat family members who are less knowledgeable about the faith, weak or less sure in their convictions. At times the opposite occurs: the supposedly mature believers within the family become unbearably arrogant. Love, on the other hand, is marked by humility; if we are to understand, forgive and serve others from the heart, our pride has to be healed and our humility must increase.

Jesus told his disciples that in a world where power prevails, each tries to dominate the other, but "it shall not be so among you" (Mt 20:26). In family life, the logic of domination and competition about who is the most intelligent or powerful destroys love.

"Love is Not Rude" (#99-100)

To love is also to be gentle and thoughtful. Love is not rude or impolite; it is not harsh. Its actions, words and gestures are pleasing and not abrasive or rigid. Love abhors making others suffer. Courtesy "is a school of sensitivity and disinterestedness" which requires a person "to develop his or her mind and feelings, learning how to listen, to speak and, at certain times, to keep quiet". It is not something that a Christian may accept or reject.

As an essential requirement of love, "every human being is bound to live agreeably with those around him". Every day, "entering into the life of another, even when that person already has a part to play in our life, demands the sensitivity and restraint which can renew trust and respect. Indeed, the deeper love is, the more it calls for respect for the other's freedom and the ability to wait until the other opens the door to his or her heart".

To be open to a genuine encounter with others, "a kind look" is essential. This is incompatible with a negative attitude that readily points out other people's shortcomings while overlooking one's own. A kind look helps us to see beyond our own limitations, to be patient and to cooperate with others, despite our differences. Loving kindness builds bonds, cultivates relationships, creates new networks of integration and knits a firm social fabric. In this way, it grows ever stronger, for without a sense of belonging we cannot sustain a commitment to others; we end up seeking our convenience alone and life in common becomes impossible. In our families, we must learn to imitate Jesus' own gentleness in our way of speaking to one another.

“Love is Generous” (#101-102)

We have repeatedly said that to love another we must first love ourselves. Paul’s hymn to love, however, states that love “does not seek its own interest”, nor “seek what is its own”. This same idea is expressed in another text: “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (*Phil 2:4*). The Bible makes it clear that generously serving others is far more noble than loving ourselves. Loving ourselves is only important as a psychological prerequisite for being able to love others: “If a man is mean to himself, to whom will he be generous? No one is meaner than the man who is grudging to himself” (*Sir 14:5-6*).

Saint Thomas Aquinas explains that “it is more proper to charity to desire to love than to desire to be loved”; indeed, “mothers, who are those who love the most, seek to love more than to be loved”. Consequently, love can transcend and overflow the demands of justice, and the greatest of loves can lead to “laying down one’s life” for another (cf. *Jn 15:13*). Can such generosity, which enables us to give freely and fully, really be possible? Yes, because it is demanded by the Gospel: “You received without pay, give without pay” (*Mt 10:8*).

“Love is Not Irritable or Resentful” (#103-104)

If the first word of Paul’s hymn spoke of the need for a patience that does not immediately react harshly to the weaknesses and faults of others, the word he uses next has to do more with an interior indignation provoked by something from without. It refers to a violent reaction within, a hidden irritation that sets us on edge where others are concerned, as if they were troublesome or threatening and thus to be avoided. To nurture such interior hostility helps no one. It only causes hurt and alienation.

The Gospel tells us to look to the “log in our own eye” (cf. *Mt 7:5*). Christians cannot ignore the persistent admonition of God’s word not to nurture anger: “Do not be overcome by evil” (*Rm 12:21*). “Let us not grow weary in doing good” (*Gal 6:9*). It is one thing to sense a sudden surge of hostility and another to give into it, letting it take root in our hearts: My advice is never to let the day end without making peace in the family. “And how am I going to make peace? By getting down on my knees? No! Just by a small gesture, a little something, and harmony within your family will be restored. Just a little caress, no words are necessary. But do not let the day end without making peace in your family.

“Love Forgives” (#105-108)

Once we allow ill will to take root in our hearts, it leads to deep resentment. The opposite of resentment is forgiveness, which is rooted in a positive attitude that seeks to understand other people’s weaknesses and to excuse them. As Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (*Lk 23:34*). Yet we keep looking for more and more faults, imagining greater evils, presuming all kinds of bad intentions, and so resentment grows and deepens. Thus, every mistake or lapse on the part of a spouse can harm the bond of love and the stability of the family. Something is wrong when we see every problem as equally serious; in this way, we risk being unduly harsh with the failings of others. The just desire to see our rights respected turns into a thirst for vengeance rather than a reasoned defense of our dignity.

When we have been offended or let down, forgiveness is possible and desirable, but no one can say that it is easy. The truth is that “family communion can only be preserved and

perfected through a great spirit of sacrifice. It requires, in fact, a ready and generous openness of each and all to understanding, to forbearance, to pardon, to reconciliation. There is no family that does not know how selfishness, discord, tension and conflict violently attack and at times mortally wound its own communion: hence there arise the many and varied forms of division in family life”.

Today we recognize that being able to forgive others implies the liberating experience of understanding and forgiving ourselves. Often our mistakes, or criticism we have received from loved ones, can lead to a loss of self-esteem. We become distant from others, avoiding affection and fearful in our interpersonal relationships. Blaming others becomes falsely reassuring. We need to learn to pray over our past history, to accept ourselves, to learn how to live with our limitations, and even to forgive ourselves, in order to have this same attitude towards others.

All this assumes that we ourselves have had the experience of being forgiven by God, justified by his grace and not by our own merits. If we accept that God’s love is unconditional, that the Father’s love cannot be bought or sold, then we will become capable of showing boundless love and forgiving others even if they have wronged us. Otherwise, our family life will no longer be a place of understanding, support and encouragement, but rather one of constant tension and mutual criticism.

“Love Rejoices with Others” (#109-110)

Love “rejoices in the right”. In other words, we rejoice at the good of others when we see their dignity and value their abilities and good works. This is impossible for those who must always be comparing and competing, even with their spouse, so that they secretly rejoice in their failures.

When a loving person can do good for others, or sees that others are happy, they themselves live happily and in this way give glory to God, for “God loves a cheerful giver” (2 Cor 9:7). Our Lord especially appreciates those who find joy in the happiness of others. If we fail to learn how to rejoice in the well-being of others, and focus primarily on our own needs, we condemn ourselves to a joyless existence, for, as Jesus said, “it is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35). The family must always be a place where, when something good happens to one of its members, they know that others will be there to celebrate it with them.

“Love Bears All Things” (#111-113)

Paul’s list ends with four phrases containing the words “all things”. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Here we see clearly the countercultural power of a love that is able to face whatever might threaten it.

First, Paul says that love “bears all things” . This is about more than simply putting up with evil; it has to do with *the use of the tongue*. The verb can mean “holding one’s peace” about what may be wrong with another person. It implies limiting judgment, checking the impulse to issue a firm and ruthless condemnation: “Judge not and you will not be judged” (Lk 6:37). Although it runs contrary to the way we normally use our tongues, God’s word tells us: “Do not speak evil against one another, brothers and sisters” (Jas 4:11). Being willing to speak ill of another person is a way of asserting ourselves, venting resentment and envy without concern for the harm we may do. We often forget that slander can be quite sinful; it is a grave offense against God

when it seriously harms another person's good name and causes damage that is hard to repair. Love cherishes the good name of others, even one's enemies. In seeking to uphold God's law we must never forget this specific requirement of love.

Married couples joined by love speak well of each other; they try to show their spouse's good side, not their weakness and faults. In any event, they keep silent rather than speak ill of them. This is not merely a way of acting in front of others; it springs from an interior attitude. Far from ingenuously claiming not to see the problems and weaknesses of others, it sees those weaknesses and faults in a wider context. It recognizes that these failings are a part of a bigger picture. We have to realize that all of us are a complex mixture of light and shadows. The other person is much more than the sum of the little things that annoy me. The other person loves me as best they can, with all their limits, but the fact that love is imperfect does not mean that it is untrue or unreal. Love coexists with imperfection. It "bears all things" and can hold its peace before the limitations of the loved one.

"Love Believes All Things" (#114-115)

Love believes all things. Here "belief" is not to be taken in its strict theological meaning, but more in the sense of what we mean by "trust". This goes beyond simply presuming that the other is not lying or cheating. Such basic trust recognizes God's light shining beyond the darkness, like an ember glowing beneath the ash.

This trust enables a relationship to be free. It means we do not have to control the other person, to follow their every step lest they escape our grip. Love trusts, it sets free, it does not try to control, possess and dominate everything. This freedom, which fosters independence, and openness to the world around us and to new experiences, can only enrich and expand relationships. The spouses then share with one another the joy of all they have received and learned outside the family circle.

At the same time, this freedom makes for sincerity and transparency. Those who know that they are trusted and appreciated can be open and hide nothing. Those who know that their spouse is always suspicious, judgmental and lacking unconditional love, will tend to keep secrets, conceal their failings and weaknesses, and pretend to be someone other than who they are. On the other hand, a family marked by loving trust, helps its members to be themselves and spontaneously to reject deceit, falsehood, and lies.

"Love Hopes All Things" (#116-117)

Love does not despair of the future. Following upon what has just been said, this phrase speaks of the hope of one who knows that others can change, mature and radiate unexpected beauty and untold potential. This does not mean that everything will change in this life. It does involve realizing that, though things may not always turn out as we wish, God may well make crooked lines straight and draw some good from the evil we endure in this world.

Here hope comes most fully into its own, for it embraces the certainty of life after death. Each person, with all his or her failings, is called to the fullness of life in heaven. There, fully transformed by Christ's resurrection, every weakness, darkness and infirmity will pass away. There the person's true being will shine forth in all its goodness and beauty. This realization helps us, amid the aggravations of this present life, to see each person from a supernatural perspective, in the light of hope, and await the fullness that he or she will receive in the heavenly kingdom, even if it is not yet visible.

“Love Endures All Things” (#118-119)

This means that love bears every trial with a positive attitude. It stands firm in hostile surroundings. This “endurance” involves not only the ability to tolerate certain aggravations, but something greater: a constant readiness to confront any challenge. It is a love that *never gives up*, even in the darkest hour. It shows a certain dogged heroism, a power to resist every negative current, an irrepressible commitment to goodness.

Here I think of the words of Martin Luther King, who met every kind of trial and tribulation with fraternal love: “The person who hates you most has some good in him; even the nation that hates you most has some good in it; even the race that hates you most has some good in it. And when you come to the point that you look in the face of every man and see deep down within him what religion calls ‘the image of God’, you begin to love him in spite of [everything]. No matter what he does, you see God’s image there.

Another way that you love your enemy is this: when the opportunity presents itself for you to defeat your enemy, that is the time when you must not do it... When you rise to the level of love, of its great beauty and power, you seek only to defeat evil systems. Individuals who happen to be caught up in that system, you love, but you seek to defeat the system... Hate for hate only intensifies the existence of hate and evil in the universe. Somewhere somebody must have a little sense, and that’s the strong person. The strong person is the person who can cut off the chain of hate, the chain of evil... Somebody must have religion enough and morality enough to cut it off and inject within the very structure of the universe that strong and powerful element of love”.

In family life, we need to cultivate that strength of love which can help us fight every evil threatening it. Love does not yield to resentment, scorn for others or the desire to hurt or to gain some advantage. The Christian ideal, especially in families, is a love that never gives up. I am sometimes amazed to see men or women who have had to separate from their spouse for their own protection, yet, because of their enduring conjugal love, still try to help them, even by enlisting others, in their moments of illness, suffering or trial. Here too we see a love that never gives up.