



Ten years after *Amoris laetitia*: *proclaiming the Gospel with families today*

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Christian families as subjects of the Church's mission

Embracing conjugal and family love as an impetus for mission

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Today's reflection is based on a strong conviction from *Amoris Laetitia*: Christian families are not just recipients of the Church's pastoral support; they are 'the main actors in family pastoral care.'¹ and active subjects of the Church's mission¹. Their contribution is irreplaceable. It does not primarily lie in their actions, but in their very being: in their way of living daily the 'deep community of life and love.'² **When their daily lives become a place where the Gospel takes flesh and is made visible in relationships, gestures, and everyday trials, they make visible Christ's love for His Church.³ And this is their first mission.**

As *Amoris Laetitia* reminds us, the 'yes' of marriage marks 'the beginning of a journey.'⁴; it is a 'story of salvation' »⁵: the spouses gradually learn to love each other more, despite their fragilities and limitations. Their love is called to mature throughout life⁶, supported by sacramental life.

Marriage unites two people who differ in their history, their character, and their expectations. Growing together in love is a challenge that requires cultivating essential attitudes: dialogue, forgiveness, patience, self-giving, and mutual respect. These are expressed, in the ordinary moments of married life, through the ability to listen to each other, to navigate conflicts, to ask for and grant forgiveness, to bear hardships together, to persevere in fidelity, to welcome a child, to care for one another, or to start over after a failure.

This is how spouses make the love of Christ visible: each step taken in love, even a modest one, becomes a sign. By allowing God's grace to work in their lives, **spouses become, for their children and those around them, 'co-workers of grace and witnesses of faith.'** »⁷. *Amoris Laetitia*⁸ It also reminds us that family is the primary place of socialization, where attention to others, sharing, respect, and mutual aid are learned. In the everyday life of the family, we concretely learn to live the Gospel.

¹ AL 200

² GS 48

³ Cf AL 121

⁴ AL 218

⁵ AL 221

⁶ Cf AL 134 et AL 220

⁷ AL 321 cit. AA 11

⁸ Cf. AL 276

Family is a place of unconditional welcome. The child is received as a gift, loved for who they are, and invited to discover their unique place within the family, even when disabilities, hardships, or certain life choices evoke misunderstandings, disagreements, or tensions.

It is also a place of faithful support over time. Parents support each child's growth, help them become free and responsible, and remain a stable presence throughout their life.

Finally, it is a place of learning discernment. Confronted with many choices and sometimes complex situations, parents guide each of their children in seeking what will help them grow and move forward on their own path.

Because we do not choose our family, everyone learns to live with differences in temperament, generation, or background. Maintaining the bond despite tensions, making room for everyone, welcoming newcomers, and caring for the most fragile are all concrete ways of living charity.

Through “thousands of small but real gestures”⁹, everyone experiences forgiveness, patience, service, fidelity, and mercy. These attitudes can be lived and manifested in any family that seeks to live the Gospel, even when their situation does not fully align with the Christian ideal of marriage. For no family is formed once and for all; none is perfect. Each is called to be transformed by God's action in their ordinary life to become a sign of God's presence in the world.

The family then becomes this “God-enlightened space in which to experience the hidden presence of the risen Lord”,¹⁰ and a true “domestic church” where faith is lived, celebrated, and transmitted daily. The family does not just pass on values; it embodies them. Faith is not primarily taught there; it is lived through attention to the most fragile, solidarity between generations, the ability to overcome difficulties together, shared prayer, and forgiveness after conflicts.

The coherence between the professed faith and the way of life thus reveals an authentically human and Christian love in all its dimensions: emotional, relational, bodily, and spiritual. It transmits to children a Christian vision of love, an essential reference point for their emotional and relational lives, especially in a cultural context marked by the trivialization of pornography.

The faith journeys observed today offer many testimonies to the fruitfulness of family life: future couples who have little catechumenate experience testify that their desire to marry in the Church was born from the memory of the faith lived by a grandparent.

The recent rise of catechumenate in France shows that faith transmission is often multidirectional: the faith journey of a child, adolescent, or adult catechumen often leads other family members to rediscover the Christian faith. All can thus witness to and transmit the Gospel to one another.

“Vital cell for transforming the world”¹¹, the family shines well beyond the home. Its way of being is evident in his places of residence, work, and engagement, including where the Church is less present.

Thus, a business leader strives to balance economic demands, the dignity of individuals, and the quality of human relationships.

⁹ AL 315

¹⁰ AL 317

¹¹ AL 324

Parents involved in the life of a school contribute to the common good by putting their skills at the service of children and families.

Those who have learned in their family life to pay attention to each person and respect the most vulnerable stand up for people who are unjustly marginalized, discredited, or judged, whether in community organizations or the workplace.

Families that attend to isolated elderly people or neighbors facing hardships demonstrate a true sense of brotherhood.

Similarly, by living and concretely passing on to their children respect for creation, families help foster a culture of integral ecology within society.

In the French context, where faith is often experienced discreetly, this testimony is expressed through how people inhabit human relationships. It is not uncommon for people distant from the Church to spontaneously seek out Christians for listening, advice, or comfort. They perceive in them attention to others, fidelity to commitments, and hope that inspire trust. Thus, without always explicitly naming their faith, Christian families make God's love perceptible and help humanize relationships at the heart of ordinary realities.

If families are truly active subjects of the Church's mission, what does that change for the Church?

This leads to a greater recognition of their role in pastoral action. Because they understand the joys and difficulties from within, spouses' words are irreplaceable; only they can testify to the marital vocation based on their lived experience.

Their contribution is expressed concretely in the many initiatives that have emerged in France over the past ten years under the impetus of *Amoris Laetitia*.

Here are some examples :

- An increasing presence of older couples in marriage preparation. Through their support, sharing their experience, and the mentoring relationships they establish, they attest that a lasting love is possible; that crises can be overcome; that fidelity can bring happiness.
- The creation of Family Houses in dioceses responds to the call of No. 229 of *Amoris Laetitia* to develop welcoming, listening, and supporting places for couples and families.
- The diversification of programs for young couples and initiatives to support parenthood, with remote formats adapted to rural areas.
- The contribution of couples to the development of diocesan guidelines for supporting separated, divorced, or remarried individuals.
- Chapter IV, especially the commentary on the hymn to Love, serves as a valuable guide for married life. It deeply touches couples and would benefit from being much more widely disseminated.

Furthermore, recognizing families as active subjects invites the Church to receive from them an irreplaceable experience of love, fidelity, education, fragility, and forgiveness. It is not just about entrusting them with more pastoral responsibilities. The Church is also called to learn from their know-how, which stems from their way of being.

Because they live daily the joys and vulnerabilities of human relationships, families know that a person grows through unconditional acceptance, faithful presence over time, patient discernment, and an inclusive approach that refuses exclusion; they also know from experience that a family grows when it makes room for the smallest and most fragile¹².

They experience that human and spiritual growth is a journey, often slow, marked by progress, setbacks, and new beginnings.

Families learn concretely how to live together despite differences and tensions, to prioritize welcome over judgment, to support each person on their own path, to discern opportunities for growth, to ensure everyone has a place, and to practice forgiveness and reconciliation.

The family experience sheds particular light on the four verbs that structure pastoral action: welcoming, accompanying, discerning, and integrating.

By allowing themselves to be guided by this experience, the Church is called to become more of what it already is: “a family of families,”¹³ where everyone can be welcomed, supported, encouraged through trials, and helped to grow in faith at their own pace.

How does this concrete experience of families illuminate the Church’s practice of listening, discerning, and decision-making? How could the Church better receive their contributions to shape and carry out its mission?

It is essential to support families in their missionary vocation. However, the issue is not only what the Church can do with them but also recognizing what the Church receives from them. When the Church recognizes families as true agents of mission, they help the Church become more synodal, missionary, and attentive to people.

¹² AL 47

¹³ AL 87