opusdei.org

Letter from Pope Francis to Married Couples

This letter, signed by the Holy Father in Saint John Lateran on December 26, is addressed to husbands and wives around the world in the "Amoris Laetitia" Year of the Family. Pope Francis encourages them to continue to walk in "the strength of Jesus' faithful love," with the help of St. Joseph and the Virgin Mary.

01/13/2022

Dear married couples throughout the world!

In this *Amoris Laetitia* Year of the Family, I am writing to express my deep affection and closeness to you at this very special time. Families have always been in my thoughts and prayers, but especially so during the pandemic, which has severely tested everyone, especially the most vulnerable among us. The present situation has made me want to accompany with humility, affection and openness each individual, married couple and family in all those situations in which you find yourselves.

We are being asked to apply to ourselves the calling that Abraham received from the Lord to set out from his land and his father's home towards a foreign land that God himself would show him (cf. Gen 12:1). We too have experienced

uncertainty, loneliness, the loss of loved ones; we too have been forced to leave behind our certainties, our “comfort zones”, our familiar ways of doing things and our ambitions, and to work for the welfare of our families and that of society as a whole, which also depends on us and our actions.

Our relationship with God shapes us, accompanies us and sends us forth as individuals and, ultimately, helps us to “set out from our land”, albeit in many cases with a certain trepidation and even fear in the face of the unknown. Yet our Christian faith makes us realize that we are not alone, for God dwells in us, with us and among us: in our families, our neighborhoods, our workplaces and schools, in the cities where we live.

Like Abraham, all husbands and wives “set out” from their own land at the moment when, in response to

the vocation to conjugal love, they decide to give themselves to each other without reserve. Becoming engaged already means setting out from your land, since it calls you to walk together along the road that leads to marriage. Different situations in life, the passage of time, the arrival of children, work and illness, all challenge couples to embrace anew their commitment to one another, to leave behind settled habits, certainties and security, and to set out towards the land that God promises: to be two in Christ,*two in one*. Your lives become a single life; you become a “we” in loving communion with Jesus, alive and present at every moment of your existence. God is always at your side; he loves you unconditionally. You are not alone!

Dear spouses, know that your children – especially the younger ones – watch you attentively; in you

they seek the signs of a strong and reliable love. “How important it is for young people to see with their own eyes the love of Christ alive and present in the love of spouses, who testify by the reality of their lives that love for ever is possible!” [1] Children are always a gift; they change the history of every family. They are thirsty for love, gratitude, esteem and trust. Being parents calls you to pass on to your children the joy of realizing that they are God’s children, children of a Father who has always loved them tenderly and who takes them by the hand each new day. As they come to know this, your children will grow in faith and trust in God.

To be sure, raising children is no easy task. But let us not forget that they also “raise” us. The family remains the primary environment where education takes place, through small gestures that are more eloquent than

words. To educate is above all to accompany the growth process, to be present to children in many different ways, to help them realize that they can always count on their parents. An educator is someone who spiritually “gives birth” to others and, above all, becomes personally engaged in their growth. For parents, it is important to relate to children with an authority that grows day by day. Children need a sense of security that can enable them to have confidence in you and in the beauty of your life together, and in the certainty that they will never be alone, whatever may come their way.

As I have already noted, we are becoming increasingly aware of the laity’s identity and mission in the Church and in society. You have the mission of transforming society by your presence in the workplace and ensuring that the needs of families are taken into due account.

Married couples too should take the lead (*primerear*) [2] in their parochial and diocesan community through their initiatives and their creativity, as an expression of the complementarity of charisms and vocations in the service of ecclesial communion. This is especially true of those couples who, together with the Church's pastors, "walk side by side with other families, to help those who are weaker, to proclaim that, even amid difficulties, Christ is always present to them." [3]

Therefore, I encourage you, dear married couples, to be active in the Church, especially in her pastoral care of families. "Shared responsibility for her mission demands that married couples and ordained ministers, especially bishops, cooperate in a fruitful manner in the care and custody of the domestic Churches." [4] Never forget that the family is the

“fundamental cell of society” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 66). Marriage is an important part of the project of building the “culture of encounter” (*Fratelli Tutti*, 216). Families are thus called to *bridge generations* in passing on the values that forge true humanity. New creativity is needed, to express, amid today’s challenges, the values that constitute us as a people, both in our societies and in the Church, the People of God.

Marriage, as a vocation, calls you to steer a tiny boat – wave-tossed yet sturdy, thanks to the reality of the sacrament – across a sometimes stormy sea. How often do you want to say, or better, cry out, like the apostles: “Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?” (Mk 4:38). Let us never forget, though, that by virtue of the sacrament of matrimony, Jesus is present in that boat; he is concerned for you and he remains at your side amid the

tempest. In another Gospel passage, as they rowed with difficulty, the disciples saw Jesus coming to them on the waters and welcomed him into their boat. Whenever you are buffeted by rough winds and storms, do the same thing: welcome Jesus into your boat, for once he “got into the boat with them… the wind ceased” (Mk 6:51). It is important that, together, you keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. Only in this way, will you find peace, overcome conflicts and discover solutions to many of your problems. Those problems, of course, will not disappear, but you will be able to see them from a different perspective.

Only by abandoning yourselves into the Lord’s hands will you be able to do what may seem impossible. Recognize your own weakness and powerlessness in the face of so many situations all around you, but at the same time be certain that Christ’s

power will thus be manifested in your weakness (cf. 2 Cor 12:9). It was precisely in the midst of the storm that the apostles came to know the kingship and divinity of Jesus, and learned to trust in him.

With these biblical passages in mind, I would now like to reflect on some of the *difficulties* and *opportunities* that families have experienced during the current pandemic. For instance, the lockdown has meant that there was more time to be together, and this proved a unique opportunity for strengthening communication within families. Naturally, this demands a particular exercise of patience. It is not easy to be together all day long, when everyone has to work, study, recreate and rest in the same house. Don't let tiredness get the better of you: may the power of love enable you to look more to others – to your spouse, to your children – than to your own

needs and concerns. Let me remind you of what I said in *Amoris Laetitia* (cf. nos. 90-119), inspired by Saint Paul's hymn to charity (cf. 1 Cor 13:1-3). Implore the gift of love from the Holy Family and reread Paul's celebration of charity, so that it can inspire your decisions and your actions (cf. Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6).

In this way, the time you spend together, far from being a penance, will be become a refuge amid the storms. May every family be a place of acceptance and understanding. Think about the advice I gave you on the importance of those three little words: "please, thanks, sorry." [5]. After every argument, "don't let the day end without making peace." [6] Don't be ashamed to kneel together before Jesus in the Eucharist, in order to find a few moments of peace and to look at each other with tenderness and goodness. Or when one of you is a little angry, take him

or her by the hand and force a complicit smile. You might also recite together a brief prayer each evening before going to bed, with Jesus at your side.

For some couples, the enforced living conditions during the quarantine were particularly difficult. Pre-existing problems were aggravated, creating conflicts that in some cases became almost unbearable. Many even experienced the breakup of a relationship that had to deal with a crisis that they found hard or impossible to manage. I would like them, too, to sense my closeness and my affection.

The breakdown of a marriage causes immense suffering, since many hopes are dashed, and misunderstandings can lead to arguments and hurts not easily healed. Children end up having to suffer the pain of seeing their

parents no longer together. Keep seeking help, then, so that you can overcome conflicts and prevent even more hurt for you and your children. The Lord Jesus, in his infinite mercy, will inspire you to carry on amid your many difficulties and sorrows. Keep praying for his help, and seek in him a refuge and a light for the journey. Discover too, in your communities, a “house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems” (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 47).

Remember also that forgiveness heals every wound. Mutual forgiveness is the fruit of an interior resolve that comes to maturity in prayer, in our relationship with God. It is a gift born of the grace poured out by Christ upon married couples whenever they turn to him and allow him to act. Christ “dwells” in your marriage and he is always waiting for you to open your hearts to him,

so that he can sustain you, as he did the disciples in the boat, by the power of his love. Our human love is weak; it needs the strength of Jesus' faithful love. With him, you can truly build your "house on rock" (Mt 7:24).

Here I would like to address a word to young people preparing for marriage. Even before the pandemic, it was not easy for engaged couples to plan their future, due to the difficulty of finding stable employment. Now that the labour market is even more insecure, I urge engaged couples not to feel discouraged, but to have the "creative courage" shown by Saint Joseph, whose memory I wanted to honour in this Year dedicated to him. In your journey towards marriage, always trust in God's providence, however limited your means, since "at times, difficulties can bring out resources we did not even think we had" (*Patris Corde*, 5). Do not hesitate

to rely on your families and friends, on the ecclesial community, on your parish, to help you prepare for marriage and family life by learning from those who have already advanced along the path on which you are now setting out.

Before concluding, I would like to greet grandparents, who during the lockdown were unable to see or spend time with their grandchildren, and all those elderly persons who felt isolated and alone during those months. Families greatly need grandparents, for they are humanity's living memory, a memory that "can help to build a more humane and welcoming world." [7]

May Saint Joseph inspire in all families a creative courage, so essential for these times of epochal change. May Our Lady help you to foster in your married lives the culture of encounter that we so

urgently need in order to face today's problems and troubles. No amount of difficulty can take away the joy of those who know that they are walking with the Lord ever at their side. Live out your vocation with enthusiasm. Never allow your faces to grow sad or gloomy; your husband or wife needs your smile. Your children need your looks of encouragement. Your priests and other families need your presence and your joy: the joy that comes from the Lord!

I greet all of you with affection, and I encourage you to carry out the mission that Jesus has entrusted to us, persevering in prayer and in "the breaking of bread" (Acts 2:42).

And please, do not forget to pray for me, even as I daily pray for you.

Fraternally,

Francis

Rome, Saint John Lateran, 26 December 2021, Feast of the Holy Family

---

[1] Video Message to Participants in the Forum “Where Do We Stand With Amoris Laetitia?” (9 June 2021).

[2] Cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 24.

[3] Video Message to Participants in the Forum “Where Do We Stand With Amoris Laetitia?” (9 June 2021).

[4] Ibid.

[5] Address to Participants in the Pilgrimage of Families during the Year of Faith (26 October 2013); cf. *Amoris Laetitia*, 133.

[6] Catechesis of 13 May 2015; cf. *Amoris Laetitia*, 104.

[7] Message for the 2021 World Day for Grandparents and the Elderly: “I am with you always” (25 July 2021).

pdf | document generated automatically from https://dev.opusdei.org/en-sg/article/letter-from-pope-francis-to-married-couples/ (08/05/2025)