



Remarks by
His Eminence
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***Looking to Jesus:
Presenting Commitment to Marriage
as a Path to Joy Today***

The power of love

One cannot consider speaking about marriage without associating it with love. As the song made popular by Frank Sinatra puts it: “*Love and marriage, they go together like a horse and carriage*”. Despite its lovely rhyme, the phrase conveys a rather romantic and simplistic idea of marriage and love. Many songs and some literature, mainly best-seller novels, are very fond of describing love as if it were but a feeling, mostly intense, that springs up in a relationship with another person, bringing happiness and pleasure for as long as it lasts. Forgive me if I begin with such a caricature of love and such a reductive picture of marriage, but it is so common in what we see and hear nowadays. Statistics in our countries show that many marriages end up in divorce, sometimes very shortly after having been celebrated. Another trend we can observe is that couples won’t choose marriage as a way of life and will simply live together lawlessly, even start a family, without caring about marriage considered as an old-fashioned tradition, obsolete or even restricting. Upon this somber background, Pope Francis has come up with a very different picture of love and of the

family, with a word and a title that brightens up the whole landscape of what marriage and family are all about in our world today: **JOY**. In his Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia*, “The Joy of Love”, Pope Francis draws up the main features of what is the true meaning of love and its contribution to a family, and more widely to our world. I dare summarize his teaching in these few words: **Love is a power**. Love is a power that can change a life, a couple, a family, the world. But if we turn the phrase around, it sounds even better.

«The power of love», I’m quite sure that another song will spring to mind because Céline Dion, our worldwide Canadian celebrated artist, made it a hit in her repertoire.

*Whenever you reach for me I'll do all that I can
We're heading for something, somewhere I've never been
Sometimes I am frightened, but I'm ready to learn
(Bout) Of the power of love.*

There’s something beautiful in these lyrics, although we can feel the uneasiness, even the fear that lie beyond while heading into this unknown territory of sharing another person’s life, the boldness of conquering this strange power called loving one another. It’s just as tremendous as daring to handle fire for the heat it conveys without burning oneself, as avoiding resembling Icarus flying towards liberty but crashing to earth after having skimmed the rays of the sun.

“The divine Heart of Jesus is a furnace of love” (Saint John Eudes)

The images depicting affection, or love, often allude to a heart as a universally accepted symbol of love. Mainly for Catholics, the figure of the Sacred Heart is one of the main figures of our iconography representing the unconditional love of God for humankind which finds its peak in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. The image is so widespread that we may not have taken notice that the Heart of Jesus is blazing and that flames shoot out of it as if it were a furnace. As we know, the power of the flames of a major conflagration produce an awesome amount of energy that leaves anyone breathless. If we could therefore imagine how the love of the Heart of Jesus can consume our hearts of flesh and transmit the power to accomplish our mission by setting ablaze the world with the Word of the Lord! If we could only understand that the burning Heart glowing upon the breast of Jesus is really a torch he is holding out to us so that we may pick it up and set the world afire!

“I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!” (Lk 12,49)

Our eyes and hearts should always be set on Jesus for He is the path leading to our joy today. His love is overwhelming and His Spirit is spread in our hearts like a fire giving us warmth for consolation and light for guidance. We all know, out of experience, that life is not an easy road to follow and that many obstacles strew the life of couples and families. I have already evoked the plague of easy divorce. I could add the danger of acute individualism that distorts family relationships and focusses on egoistic interests; the danger of considering such values as forbearing, fidelity, generosity, patience, forgiveness, as obsolete while they are foundations upon which the family will not fall apart albeit *“the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall because it had been founded on the rock”* (Mt 7, 27).

Pope Francis emphasizes this focus we must have on Jesus Christ to understand and fulfill our commitment to marriage as a path to joy, steadiness, happiness and success, today: *“A Christian family can be fully understood only in the light of the Father’s infinite love revealed in Christ, who gave himself up for our sake and who continues to dwell in our midst. I now wish to turn my gaze to the living Christ, who is at the heart of so many love stories, and to invoke the fire of the Spirit upon all the world’s families”* (Amoris laetitia, N° 57).

A bright future for the Christian family

If I were to make an announcement on the future of the Christian family, no words would better translate my convictions and my hopes than those written by our Holy Father, our beloved pope Francis: *“We Christians remain steadfast in our intention to respect others, to heal wounds, to build bridges, to strengthen relationships and to ‘bear one another’s burdens’ (Gal 6:2). Today too, various associations for the defence of rights and the pursuit of noble goals are being founded. This is a sign of the desire of many people to contribute to social and cultural progress”* (Evangelii Gaudium, N° 67).

The power of the love of Christ

I wish to conclude this brief address by assessing some opportunities Christian parents and families must prioritize when they are pursuing the joy of living with Christ as their hearts are ablaze with the fire of the Spirit. If I could say it in your words, this is how it could sound:

- To whoever would say that love is only a temporary commitment: With the fire of the Heart of Jesus and the power of His love, I would answer that my God has been loving me forever, that His love has been revealed in the Incarnation of His beloved Son and that he has promised to accompany me in my own life and in the world, till the end of times.

- To whoever would say that family life is outdated, that every human being must accomplish one's own destiny: With the fire of the Heart of Jesus and the power of His love, I could pay testimony to love and fidelity in my couple and in my family. I could show how enriching it is to see my folk grow in comfort, steadiness, love and happiness, and prove how we have all learned from our mistakes and have grown through them.
- To whoever would say that God doesn't pay attention to human beings: With the fire of the Heart of Jesus and the power of His love, I could work endlessly on being good so that all those who need help and mercy, in my family and in my neighbourhood, may be relieved and enlightened by my endeavour.
- To whoever would say that God doesn't care about my marriage nor my family: With the fire of the Heart of Jesus and the power of His love, I could give the best evidence possible of my faith and show how much the Lord gives meaning and a direction to my life, and testify how He will do the same to whoever will follow Him in the path leading to the joy and comfort of being taken care of by His grace.
- To whoever says that God is nothing but a pipedream: With the fire of the Heart of Jesus and the power of His love, I could make every endeavor to radiate the joy, the hope in front of problems and the charity that comes from the grace of the divine power of His love in my own heart, in every member of my family and in the life of all those who surround me.

I would then have understood the true meaning of the burning Heart of Jesus, the extraordinary power emerging from this Furnace of Love, inviting me to radiate His life and love in my life, my family and to all people.