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# The joy of a sincere and true love

We celebrate the first anniversary of "Amoris Laetitia" with a collection of quotes from the Apostolic Exhortation which can help us reflect and take up the joyful challenge of the most important virtue.

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19 March 2017 is the first anniversary of the publication of Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*. Its 325 points are a deep tribute to human love, in

perfect harmony with the Love of God. The whole of the magisterial text is a gem which gives new life to sincere and true love and serves to reflect on the most important virtue: charity.

In this first anniversary we offer a summary by way of short quotes taken from the Apostolic Exhortation. It is not a selection of the most important parts, as the whole document is important. Instead it is a selection of texts organized by topic (Love; Marriage; Children; Family; God, Church and family; Family and Society). They can be used to spread the content of this papal document which is a call to the heart of men and women, to the heart of families, to the heart of society.

It would be ideal if this extensive selection of quotes would encourage people to go back to Amoris Laetitia,

to read it slowly, to meditate on it or even to read for the first time.

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- Love • Marriage • Children • Family
- God, Church and family • Family and society

## **Love**

● Against this backdrop of love so central to the Christian experience of marriage and the family, another virtue stands out, one often overlooked in our world of frenetic and superficial relationships. It is tenderness.

● The experience of love in families is a perennial source of strength for the life of the Church.

● Love always has an aspect of deep compassion that leads to accepting the other person as part of this

world, even when he or she acts differently than I would like.

● 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, who gives us everything “for our enjoyment”

● Those who love not only refrain from speaking too much about themselves, but are focused on others; they do not need to be the centre of attention.

● 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.

- Loving kindness builds bonds, cultivates relationships, creates new networks of integration and knits a firm social fabric.
- Those who love are capable of speaking words of comfort, strength, consolation, and encouragement.
- 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”
- 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. It is real, albeit limited and earthly.
- Love trusts, it sets free, it does not try to control, possess and dominate everything. This freedom, which fosters independence, an openness to the world around us and to new

experiences, can only enrich and expand relationships.

● 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.

● After the love that unites us to God, conjugal love is the “greatest form of friendship”.

● Let us be honest and acknowledge the signs that this is the case. Lovers do not see their relationship as merely temporary.

● A love that is weak or infirm, incapable of accepting marriage as a challenge to be taken up and fought for, reborn, renewed and reinvented until death, cannot sustain a great commitment. It will succumb to the culture of the ephemeral that prevents a constant process of growth.

● In marriage, the joy of love needs to be cultivated. When the search for pleasure becomes obsessive, it holds us in thrall and keeps us from experiencing other satisfactions. Joy, on the other hand, increases our pleasure and helps us find fulfilment in any number of things, even at those times of life when physical pleasure has ebbed.

● In a consumerist society, the sense of beauty is impoverished and so joy fades. Everything is there to be purchased, possessed or consumed, including people. Tenderness, on the other hand, is a sign of a love free of selfish possessiveness. It makes us approach a person with immense respect and a certain dread of causing them harm or taking away their freedom.

● Loving another person involves the joy of contemplating and appreciating their innate beauty and

sacredness, which is greater than my needs.

● The aesthetic experience of love is expressed in that “gaze” which contemplates other persons as ends in themselves, even if they are infirm, elderly or physically unattractive.

● This “yes” tells them that they can always trust one another, and that they will never be abandoned when difficulties arise or new attractions or selfish interests present themselves.

● This love must be freely and generously expressed in words and acts. In the family, “three words need to be used. I want to repeat this! Three words: ‘Please’, ‘Thank you’, ‘Sorry’. Three essential words!”.

● The right words, spoken at the right time, daily protect and nurture love.

● It is not helpful to dream of an idyllic and perfect love needing no stimulus to grow. A celestial notion of earthly love forgets that the best is yet to come, that new wine matures with age.

● Love surmounts even the worst barriers.

● Virginity and marriage are, and must be, different ways of loving. For “man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him”.

● Celibacy can risk becoming a comfortable single life that provides the freedom to be independent, to move from one residence, work or option to another, to spend money as one sees fit and to spend time with others as one wants. In such cases, the witness of married people becomes especially eloquent. Those

called to virginity can encounter in some marriages a clear sign of God's generous and steadfast fidelity to his covenant, and this can move them to a more concrete and generous availability to others.

- 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.

- 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.

- The love they pledge is greater than any emotion, feeling or state of mind, although it may include all of these. It is a deeper love, a lifelong decision of the heart.

● In the course of every marriage physical appearances change, but this hardly means that love and attraction need fade. We love the other person for who they are, not simply for their body. Although the body ages, it still expresses that personal identity that first won our heart.

Even if others can no longer see the beauty of that identity, a spouse continues to see it with the eyes of love and so his or her affection does not diminish.

● Love always gives life. Conjugal love “does not end with the couple... The couple, in giving themselves to one another, give not just themselves but also the reality of children, who are a living reflection of their love, a permanent sign of their conjugal unity and a living and inseparable synthesis of their being a father and a mother”.

- Love needs time and space; everything else is secondary. Time is needed to talk things over, to embrace leisurely, to share plans, to listen to one other and gaze in each other's eyes, to appreciate one another and to build a stronger relationship.
- Each crisis has a lesson to teach us; we need to learn how to listen for it with the ear of the heart.
- Some love with the selfish, capricious and self-centred love of a child: an insatiable love that screams or cries when it fails to get what it wants.
- Love involves an intuition that can enable us to hear without sounds and to see the unseen.

## **Marriage**

- As Christians, we can hardly stop advocating marriage simply to avoid

countering contemporary sensibilities, or out of a desire to be fashionable or a sense of helplessness in the face of human and moral failings. We would be depriving the world of values that we can and must offer... We also need to be humble and realistic, acknowledging that at times the way we present our Christian beliefs and treat other people has helped contribute to today's problematic situation. We need a healthy dose of self-criticism.

● We need to find the right language, arguments and forms of witness that can help us reach the hearts of young people, appealing to their capacity for generosity, commitment, love and even heroism, and in this way inviting them to take up the challenge of marriage with enthusiasm and courage.

● Our teaching on marriage and the family cannot fail to be inspired and transformed by this message of love and tenderness; otherwise, it becomes nothing more than the defence of a dry and lifeless doctrine.

● The sacrament of marriage is not a social convention, an empty ritual or merely the outward sign of a commitment. The sacrament is a gift given for the sanctification and salvation of the spouses, since “their mutual belonging is a real representation, through the sacramental sign, of the same relationship between Christ and the Church. The married couple are therefore a permanent reminder for the Church of what took place on the cross; they are for one another and for their children witnesses of the salvation in which they share through the sacrament”.

● Sexual union, lovingly experienced and sanctified by the sacrament, is in turn a path of growth in the life of grace for the couple.

● 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.

● Marital joy can be experienced even amid sorrow; it involves accepting that marriage is an inevitable mixture of enjoyment and struggles, tensions and repose, pain and relief, satisfactions and longings, annoyances and pleasures, but always on the path of friendship, which inspires married couples to care for one another.

● After suffering and struggling together, spouses are able to

experience that it was worth it, because they achieved some good, learned something as a couple, or came to appreciate what they have. Few human joys are as deep and thrilling as those experienced by two people who love one another and have achieved something as the result of a great, shared effort.

● Naturally, love is much more than an outward consent or a contract, yet it is nonetheless true that choosing to give marriage a visible form in society by undertaking certain commitments shows how important it is. It manifests the seriousness of each person's identification with the other and their firm decision to leave adolescent individualism behind and to belong to one another.

● Marriage is a means of expressing that we have truly left the security of the home in which we grew up in order to build other strong ties and

to take on a new responsibility for another person. This is much more meaningful than a mere spontaneous association for mutual gratification, which would turn marriage into a purely private affair.

● As a social institution, marriage protects and shapes a shared commitment to deeper growth in love and commitment to one another, for the good of society as a whole. That is why marriage is more than a fleeting fashion; it is of enduring importance. Its essence derives from our human nature and social character.

● Marital love is not defended primarily by presenting indissolubility as a duty, or by repeating doctrine, but by helping it to grow ever stronger under the impulse of grace. A love that fails to grow is at risk. Growth can only occur if we respond to God's grace

through constant acts of love, acts of kindness that become ever more frequent, intense, generous, tender and cheerful.

- Dialogue is essential for experiencing, expressing and fostering love in marriage and family life.

- The unity that we seek is not uniformity, but a “unity in diversity”, or “reconciled diversity”.

- Fraternal communion is enriched by respect and appreciation for differences within an overall perspective that advances the common good.

- The ability to say what one is thinking without offending the other person is important. Words should be carefully chosen so as not to offend, especially when discussing difficult issues. Making a point should never involve venting anger

and in inflicting hurt. A patronizing tone only serves to hurt, ridicule, accuse and offend others. Many disagreements between couples are not about important things. Mostly they are about trivial matters. What alters the mood, however, is the way things are said or the attitude with which they are said.

● For a worth-while dialogue we have to have something to say. This can only be the fruit of an interior richness nourished by reading, personal reflection, prayer and openness to the world around us. Otherwise, conversations become boring and trivial. When neither of the spouses works at this, and has little real contact with other people, family life becomes stifling and dialogue impoverished.

● Marital love strives to ensure that one's entire emotional life benefits

the family as a whole and stands at the service of its common life.

● Sexuality is not a means of gratification or entertainment; it is an interpersonal language wherein the other is taken seriously, in his or her sacred and inviolable dignity.

● The ideal of marriage cannot be seen purely as generous donation and self-sacrifice, where each spouse renounces all personal needs and seeks only the other's good without concern for personal satisfaction. We need to remember that authentic love also needs to be able to receive the other, to accept one's own vulnerability and needs, and to welcome with sincere and joyful gratitude the physical expressions of love found in a caress, an embrace, a kiss and sexual union.

● When love is merely physical attraction or a vague affection, spouses become particularly

vulnerable once this affection wanes or physical attraction diminishes.

● A persistently critical attitude towards one's partner is a sign that marriage was not entered into as a project to be worked on together, with patience, understanding, tolerance and generosity. Slowly but surely, love will then give way to constant questioning and criticism, dwelling on each other's good and bad points, issuing ultimatums and engaging in competition and self-justification.

● I recall an old saying: still water becomes stagnant and good for nothing. If, in the first years of marriage, a couple's experience of love grows stagnant, it loses the very excitement that should be its propelling force.

● Among the causes of broken marriages are unduly high expectations about conjugal life.

Once it becomes apparent that the reality is more limited and challenging than one imagined, the solution is not to think quickly and irresponsibly about separation, but to come to the sober realization that married life is a process of growth, in which each spouse is God's means of helping the other to mature.

● Each crisis becomes an apprenticeship in growing closer together or learning a little more about what it means to be married. There is no need for couples to resign themselves to an inevitable downward spiral or a tolerable mediocrity. On the contrary, when marriage is seen as a challenge that involves overcoming obstacles, each crisis becomes an opportunity to let the wine of their relationship age and improve.

● When problems are not dealt with, communication is the first thing to

go. Little by little, the “the person I love” slowly becomes “my mate”, then just “the father or mother of my children”, and finally a stranger.

● At these times, it becomes all the more important to create opportunities for speaking heart to heart. Unless a couple learns to do this, they will find it harder and harder as time passes.

Communication is an art learned in moments of peace in order to be practised in moments of difficulty.

● It is becoming more and more common to think that, when one or both partners no longer feel fulfilled, or things have not turned out the way they wanted, sufficient reason exists to end the marriage. Were this the case, no marriage would last.

● Respect needs to be shown especially for the sufferings of those who have unjustly endured separation, divorce or abandonment,

or those who have been forced by maltreatment from a husband or a wife to interrupt their life together. To forgive such an injustice that has been suffered is not easy, but grace makes this journey possible. I make this appeal to parents who are separated: “Never ever, take your child hostage! You separated for many problems and reasons. Life gave you this trial, but your children should not have to bear the burden of this separation or be used as hostages against the other spouse. They should grow up hearing their mother speak well of their father, even though they are not together, and their father speak well of their mother”.

## **Children**

● The Gospel goes on to remind us that children are not the property of a family, but have their own lives to lead.

● The Church is called to cooperate with parents through suitable pastoral initiatives, assisting them in the fulfilment of their educational mission. She must always do this by helping them to appreciate their proper role and to realize that by their reception of the sacrament of marriage they become ministers of their children's education. In educating them, they build up the Church.

● Children not only want their parents to love one another, but also to be faithful and remain together.

● Adoption is a very generous way to become parents. I encourage those who cannot have children to expand their marital love to embrace those who lack a proper family situation.

● Growing up with brothers and sisters makes for a beautiful experience of caring for and helping one another.

● Inevitably, each child will surprise us with ideas and projects born of that freedom, which challenge us to rethink our own ideas. This is a good thing. Education includes encouraging the responsible use of freedom to face issues with good sense and intelligence. It involves forming persons who readily understand that their own lives, and the life of the community, are in their hands, and that freedom is itself a great gift.

● When children no longer feel that, for all their faults, they are important to their parents, or that their parents are sincerely concerned about them, this causes deep hurt and many difficulties along their path to maturity. This physical or emotional absence creates greater hurt than any scolding which a child may receive for doing something wrong.

● Correction is also an incentive whenever children's efforts are appreciated and acknowledged, and they sense their parents' constant, patient trust. Children who are lovingly corrected feel cared for; they perceive that they are individuals whose potential is recognized.

● One of the things children need to learn from their parents is not to get carried away by anger.

● The family is the first school of human values, where we learn the wise use of freedom.

When children or adolescents are not helped to realize that some things have to be waited for, they can become obsessed with satisfying their immediate needs and develop the vice of "wanting it all now". This is a grand illusion which does not favour freedom but weakens it.

● The family is the primary setting for socialization, since it is where we first learn to relate to others, to listen and share, to be patient and show respect, to help one another and live as one.

● It is not easy to approach the issue of sex education in an age when sexuality tends to be trivialized and impoverished. It can only be seen within the broader framework of an education for love, for mutual self-giving. In such a way, the language of sexuality would not be sadly impoverished but illuminated and enriched.

● A sexual education that fosters a healthy sense of modesty has immense value, however much some people nowadays consider modesty a relic of a bygone era. Modesty is a natural means whereby we defend our personal privacy and prevent ourselves from being turned into

objects to be used. Without a sense of modesty, affection and sexuality can be reduced to an obsession with genitality and unhealthy behaviours that distort our capacity for love, and with forms of sexual violence that lead to inhuman treatment or cause hurt to others.

- The home must continue to be the place where we learn to appreciate the meaning and beauty of the faith, to pray and to serve our neighbour.

- Education in the faith has to adapt to each child, since older resources and recipes do not always work.

- It is essential that children actually see that, for their parents, prayer is something truly important.

- I would like to express my particular gratitude to all those mothers who continue to pray, like Saint Monica, for their children who have strayed from Christ.

● The work of handing on the faith to children, in the sense of facilitating its expression and growth, helps the whole family in its evangelizing mission. It naturally begins to spread the faith to all around them, even outside of the family circle.

## **Family**

● Families and homes go together. This makes us see how important it is to insist on the rights of the family and not only those of individuals. The family is a good which society cannot do without, and it ought to be protected.

● No one can think that the weakening of the family as that natural society founded on marriage will prove beneficial to society as a whole. The contrary is true: it poses a threat to the mature growth of individuals, the cultivation of

community values and the moral progress of cities and countries.

● Many men are conscious of the importance of their role in the family and live their masculinity accordingly. The absence of a father gravely affects family life and the upbringing of children and their integration into society. This absence, which may be physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual, deprives children of a suitable father figure.

● 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 centre 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.

● In family life, the logic of domination and competition about who is the most intelligent or powerful destroys love.

● 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.

● 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.

● 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, come what may, helps its members to be themselves and spontaneously to reject deceit, falsehood, and lies.

● You can't have a family without dreams. Once a family loses the

ability to dream, children do not grow, love does not grow, life shrivels up and dies”.

- The nuclear family needs to interact with the wider family made up of parents, aunts and uncles, cousins and even neighbours. This greater family may have members who require assistance, or at least companionship and affection, or consolation amid suffering.

- It helps to break the routine with a party, and to enjoy family celebrations of anniversaries and special events. We need these moments of cherishing God's gifts and renewing our zest for life. As long as we can celebrate, we are able to rekindle our love, to free it from monotony and to colour our daily routine with hope.

- The life of every family is marked by all kinds of crises, yet these are also part of its dramatic beauty.

Couples should be helped to realize that surmounting a crisis need not weaken their relationship; instead, it can improve, settle and mature the wine of their union.

- Life together should not diminish but increase their contentment; every new step along the way can help couples find new ways to happiness.

- To know how to forgive and to feel forgiven is a basic experience in family life.

- Every day the family has to come up with new ways of appreciating and acknowledging its members.

- No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed; families need constantly to grow and mature in the ability to love.

**God, Church, and family**

● A family's living space could turn into a domestic church, a setting for the Eucharist, the presence of Christ seated at its table.

● The family is called to join in daily prayer, to read the word of God and to share in Eucharistic communion, and thus to grow in love and become ever more fully a temple in which the Spirit dwells.

● Nowadays we are grateful too for the witness of marriages that have not only proved lasting, but also fruitful and loving. All these factors can inspire a positive and welcoming pastoral approach capable of helping couples to grow in appreciation of the demands of the Gospel. Yet we have often been on the defensive, wasting pastoral energy on denouncing a decadent world without being proactive in proposing ways of finding true happiness. Many people feel that the Church's

message on marriage and the family does not clearly reflect the preaching and attitudes of Jesus, who set forth a demanding ideal yet never failed to show compassion and closeness to the frailty of individuals like the Samaritan woman or the woman caught in adultery.

● It is one thing to be understanding of human weakness and the complexities of life, and another to accept ideologies that attempt to sunder what are inseparable aspects of reality.

● Let us not fall into the sin of trying to replace the Creator. We are creatures, and not omnipotent. Creation is prior to us and must be received as a gift. At the same time, we are called to protect our humanity, and this means, in the first place, accepting it and respecting it as it was created.

● 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.

● Marriage is a precious sign, for "when a man and a woman celebrate the sacrament of marriage, God is, as it were, 'mirrored' in them; he impresses in them his own features and the indelible character of his love. Marriage is the icon of God's love for us."

● Large families are a joy for the Church. They are an expression of the fruitfulness of love.

● Pregnancy is a difficult but wonderful time. A mother joins with God to bring forth the miracle of a new life.

● The love of parents is the means by which God our Father shows his

own love. He awaits the birth of each child, accepts that child unconditionally, and welcomes him or her freely.

● With great affection I urge all future mothers: keep happy and let nothing rob you of the interior joy of motherhood. Your child deserves your happiness. Don't let fears, worries, other people's comments or problems lessen your joy at being God's means of bringing a new life to the world.

● A married couple who experience the power of love know that this love is called to bind the wounds of the outcast, to foster a culture of encounter and to fight for justice. God has given the family the job of "domesticating" the world.

● By their witness as well as their words, families speak to others of Jesus. They pass on the faith, they arouse a desire for God and they

reflect the beauty of the Gospel and its way of life. Christian marriages thus enliven society by their witness of fraternity, their social concern, their outspokenness on behalf of the underprivileged, their luminous faith and their active hope. Their fruitfulness expands and in countless ways makes God's love present in society.

● Very often it is grandparents who ensure that the most important values are passed down to their grandchildren, and many people can testify that they owe their initiation into the Christian life to their grandparents.

● Each marriage is a kind of “salvation history”, which from fragile beginnings – thanks to God's gift and a creative and generous response on our part – grows over time into something precious and enduring.

● Handing on the faith presumes that parents themselves genuinely trust God, seek him and sense their need for him, for only in this way does “one generation laud your works to another, and declare your mighty acts”

● The Lord’s presence dwells in real and concrete families, with all their daily troubles and struggles, joys and hopes. Living in a family makes it hard for us to feign or lie; we cannot hide behind a mask. If that authenticity is inspired by love, then the Lord reigns there, with his joy and his peace. The spirituality of family love is made up of thousands of small but real gestures.

● If a family is centred on Christ, he will unify and illumine its entire life. Moments of pain and difficulty will be experienced in union with the Lord’s cross, and his closeness will make it possible to surmount them.

● There comes a point where a couple's love attains the height of its freedom and becomes the basis of a healthy autonomy. This happens when each spouse realizes that the other is not his or her own, but has a much more important master, the one Lord.

● It is a profound spiritual experience to contemplate our loved ones with the eyes of God and to see Christ in them. This demands a freedom and openness which enable us to appreciate their dignity.

## **Family and Society**

● The weakening of this maternal presence with its feminine qualities poses a grave risk to our world. I certainly value feminism, but one that does not demand uniformity or negate motherhood. For the grandeur of women includes all the rights derived from their inalienable human dignity but also from their

feminine genius, which is essential to society.

● God sets the father in the family so that by the gifts of his masculinity he can be “close to his wife and share everything, joy and sorrow, hope and hardship. And to be close to his children as they grow – when they play and when they work, when they are carefree and when they are distressed, when they are talkative and when they are silent, when they are daring and when they are afraid, when they stray and when they get back on the right path. To be a father who is always present. When I say ‘present’, I do not mean ‘controlling’. Fathers who are too controlling overshadow their children, they don’t let them develop”.

● The individualism so prevalent today can lead to creating small nests of security, where others are perceived as bothersome or a threat.

Such isolation, however, cannot offer greater peace or happiness; rather, it straitens the heart of a family and makes its life all the more narrow.

● The virtuous bond between generations is the guarantee of the future, and is the guarantee of a truly humane society. A society with children who do not honour parents is a society without honour.

● Our contemporary experience of being orphans as a result of cultural discontinuity, uprootedness and the collapse of the certainties that shape our lives, challenges us to make our families places where children can sink roots in the rich soil of a collective history.

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