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Video Message of the Holy Father to participants in the Forum “Where do we stand with Amoris Laetitia? Strategies for the application of Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation”

The following is the text of the video message sent by the Holy Father Francis to the participants in the Forum “Where do we stand with Amoris Laetitia? Strategies for the application of Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation”, held online by the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life from 9 to 12 June 2021, as part of the “Amoris laetitia Family” Year.

Video Message of the Holy Father

Dear brothers in the episcopate,

dear brothers and sisters,

I address you on the occasion of the Forum organised by the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life, five years on from the promulgation of the Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris laetitia*. I thank the Dicastery for having taken the initiative, despite the practical difficulties due to the pandemic. And I am grateful to you all for responding to the invitation: the delegates of the Family Offices of over 60 episcopal Conferences and of over 30 international movements are here today, linked up for this meeting.

In the panorama of the most important initiatives for the “*Amoris laetitia* Family Year”, the Forum represents an essential moment of dialogue between the Holy See, the episcopal conferences, movements and family associations. The Holy Spirit makes it a fruitful moment for the Church, pastors and laypersons together, to come together to listen to the concrete needs of families and to help each other in undertaking the processes necessary to renew the proclamation of the Church.

The question you ask yourselves -

“Where do we stand with the application of *Amoris laetitia*?” – is intended to stimulate a fruitful ecclesial discernment on the style and the aims of family pastoral care from the perspective of new evangelization. The Exhortati

on *Amoris laetitia* is the fruit of an in-depth synodal reflection on marriage and the family and, as such, requires patient work in implementation and missionary conversion. This Forum is positioned in continuity with the synod path, which must be able to be implemented in the local Churches and which requires cooperation, sharing of responsibility, the capacity for discernment and willingness to be close to families.

In the midst of the difficulties caused by the pandemic, which lacerate the life of the family and “its intimate communion of life and love”[1], the family today is more than ever a sign of the times and the Church is invited above all to listen actively to families, and at the same time to involve them as subjects of pastoral care. It is necessary to set aside any “merely theoretical message without connection to people’s real problems”[2], as well as the idea that evangelisation is reserved for a pastoral elite. All baptised persons are “agents of evangelisation”[3]. To bring God’s love to families and young people, who will build the families of tomorrow, we need the help of the families themselves, their concrete experience of life and communion. We need spouses alongside the pastors, to walk with other families, to help those who are weaker, to announce that, even in difficulties, Christ is present in the Sacrament of Marriage to give tenderness, patience and hope to all, in every situation of life.

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 with their real lives that love for ever is possible!

Just as the spouses Aquila and Priscilla were valuable collaborators of Saint Paul in his mission, so too today many married couples, and even entire families with children[4], can become valid witnesses to accompany other families, create community, and sow seeds of communion among the peoples receiving the first evangelisation, contributing in a decisive way to the proclamation of the *kerygma*.

Marriage, like the priesthood, “serves to build up the People of God” [5] and confers a special mission to spouses in the edification of the Church. The family is a “domestic Church”[6], the place in which the sacramental presence of Christ acts between spouses and between parents and children. In this sense, “the experience of love in families is a perennial source of strength for the life of the Church”[7], constantly enriched by the life of all the domestic Churches. Therefore, by virtue of the Sacrament of marriage, every family becomes to full effect a good for the Church.[8]

Co-responsibility for the mission therefore calls upon married couples and ordained ministers, especially bishops, to cooperate in a fruitful manner in the care and custody of the domestic Churches. Therefore, we pastors must let ourselves be enlightened by the Spirit, so that this salvific proclamation may be realised by married couples who are often there, ready, but not called upon.[9] If, on the other hand, we call to them, we call them to work with us, if we give them space, they can make their contribution to the construction of the ecclesial fabric. Just as the warp and the weft of the masculine and feminine, in their complementarity, combine to make up the tapestry of the family, so too the sacraments of Holy Orders and marriage are both indispensable to building up the Church as a “family of families”. In this way we will be able to have a pastoral care of families in which one breathes fully the spirit of ecclesial communion. Indeed, this is “likened to an ‘organic’ communion, analogous to that of a living and functioning body ... characterised by a diversity and a complementarity of vocations and states in life”. [10]

I invite you, therefore, to take a fresh look at *Amoris laetitia* in order to identify, among the pastoral priorities indicated therein, those that best correspond to the concrete needs of each local Church and to pursue them with creativity and missionary zeal. In the time of the pandemic, the Lord has given us the opportunity to rethink not only our needs and priorities, but also the style and the way in which we plan and implement our pastoral engagement. In the wake of the programmatic value of *Evangelii gaudium* and the concrete pastoral programme outlined by *Amoris laetitia* for family pastoral care, “I hope that all communities will devote the necessary effort to advancing along the path of a pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot leave things as they presently are”. [11]

A special effort must be made in the formation of laypeople, especially spouses and families, so that they may better understand the importance of their ecclesial commitment, that is, the meaning of the mission that derives from being married couples and families. So many families are unaware of the great gift they have received in the

Sacrament, an effective sign of Christ's presence which accompanies every moment of their lives. When a family fully discovers this gift, it feels the desire to share it with other families, because the joy of the encounter with the Lord tends to spread and generates other communion; it is naturally missionary.[12]

The path undertaken with the Synodal Assemblies on the family has helped the Church to bring to light many concrete challenges that families experience: ideological pressures that hinder educational processes, relational problems, material and spiritual poverty and, at the root, a great deal of loneliness due to the difficulty of perceiving God in one's own life. Some of these challenges are still struggling to be met and require a renewed pastoral impetus in some particular areas: I am thinking of marriage preparation, the accompaniment of young married couples, education, attention to the elderly, closeness to wounded families or to those who, in a new union, wish to live the Christian experience to the full.

I hope, therefore, that these days of work will be a good opportunity to share ideas and pastoral experiences; and also to create a network which, in the complementarity of vocations and states of life, in a spirit of collaboration and ecclesial communion, can proclaim the Gospel of the family in the most effective way, responding to the signs of the times.

I entrust you to the intercession of Mary Most Holy and of Saint Joseph, so that the grace of God may make your commitment fruitful for the good of the families of today and tomorrow. I bless you and wish you good work, and I ask you, please, to pray for me. Thank you.

[1] Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (hereafter *AL*), 19.

[2] *AL*, 201.

[3] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* (24 November 2013), 120.

[4] See St. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio* (22 November 1981), 50.

[5] Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1534.

[6] Vatican Ecumenical Council II, Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, 11.

[7] *AL* 88.

[8] Cf. *ibid.*, 87.

[9] Cf. *Address to the Tribunal of the Roman Rota for the Inauguration of the Judicial Year*, 25 January 2020.

[10] Saint John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles laici* (30 December 1988), 20.

[11] Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium*, 25.

[12] Cf. *Ibid*, 23.
