

Section 37
MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE:
A GIFT AND AN OPPORTUNITY TO GROW IN LOVE.

At the beginning of his Exhortation on the “Joy of Love”, Pope Francis declares that, *“families are not a problem; they are first and foremost an opportunity”* (AL 7), that is, an opportunity to grow in love. *“Marriage is “a gift” from the Lord”* (AL 61), he says, and both husband and wife *“are called to respond to God’s gift with commitment, creativity, perseverance and daily effort”* (AL 74).

The Pope reminds us that, *“it is not helpful to dream of an idyllic and perfect love needing no stimulus to grow”* (AL 135). It is *“much healthier to be realistic about our limits, defects and imperfections, and to respond to the call to grow together, to bring love to maturity and to strengthen the union, come what may.”* Don’t forget, he counsels *“that the best is yet to come, that fine wine matures with age”* (AL 135).

‘Growing in love’ is a constantly recurring theme in the Pope’s letter. *“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. Fostering growth means helping a person to shape his or her own identity”* (AL 221).

Likewise, *“the indissolubility of marriage – ‘what God has joined together, let no man put asunder’ (Mt 19:6) – should not be viewed as a ‘yoke’ imposed on humanity, but as a ‘gift’ granted to those who are joined in marriage”* (AL 62). Why a gift? Because the promise of upholding *“the ideal of growing old together, looking after and supporting one another”* (AL 39), will also overcome the tendency *“to remain in the early stages of affective and sexual life”* (AL 41). This promise, given to one another during the wedding ceremony,

encourages husband and wife “to make their love grow and deepen” (AL 88). “A love that fails to grow is at risk,” the Pope states, while “growth can only occur through constant acts of love, acts of kindness that become ever more frequent, intense, generous, tender and cheerful” (AL 134).

A Reflective Moment

*“Joy also grows through pain and sorrow.
In the words of Saint Augustine,
‘the greater the danger in battle
the greater is the joy of victory’.*

*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.”*

(Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*, n.130).