

Catholic

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POPE FRANCIS ON LOVE IN THE FAMILY

BY JAMES HEALY PHD

Every pope is called upon to take his own experience of the eternal truths of the Catholic faith and express them in words and actions that speak to the generation he serves. In doing so, he builds on the wisdom of those before him, while adding, as God demands, his own gifts.

In 1981, in response to a synod on the family, Pope John Paul II wrote *On the Family (Familiaris Consortio)*, a document that gave the Church, especially those of us in family ministry, our marching orders. Now, thirty-five years later, comes another family synod and Pope Francis' apostolic exhortation *The Joy of Love (Amoris Laetitia)*, from which we hope to be similarly instructed.

Readers who go to the text itself will be rewarded because much of the writing is informal, almost conversational. An astonishing number of topics are dealt

with, and the pope himself suggests that people might start with the chapters that most pertain to them, taking the time to ponder the contents. The pope often returns to topics, approaching them from different lights and contexts. With this in mind, I believe there are three central ideas that can give a helpful perspective to the entire exhortation.

Spousal Love

Marriage is on Pope Francis' mind and heart more than anything else. To address it, he begins with Scripture. There is much advice about marriage in the Bible, but the pontiff's message goes deeper. The relation of a man and a woman in marriage is used as the key image to describe the relation between God and his people in the Old Testament and Christ and his Church in the New Testament. This is the heart of our Catholic sacramental understanding of marriage.



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