
"Let the holiness of God shine forth" (cf. Mt 5, 16)

item 413

report from Thi Nghe

Fr Martin has been living in Vietnam since October 2015. He does so, as he often says, under the special protection of a great Saint, the little Therese of Lisieux, one of the patrons of foreign missions. Fr Adam arrived only two months ago and has now just started his acclimatization.



As two sons of our father, St Vincent Pallotti, we live in the catholic parish of **Thi Nghe**, together with three Vietnamese priests and two young students. The community is very welcoming and very dynamic. Every Sunday more than five hundred children participate in Mass and follow different catechetical activities. On the Sunday after this year's feast of Divine Mercy, we enjoyed some time travelling with them and visiting some of the most disadvantaged persons living at peripheries of the parish. Two weeks later we

were filled with wonder at how these young people were so cheerful and willing to follow the voice of the Good Shepherd.

In the future we hope to open a house here for young candidates. For the time being though we are taking Vietnamese lessons at the University of Sciences in Ho Chi Minh City. However, in order to learn Vietnamese, we first need to know English. Otherwise it would be almost impossible to understand anything of this language which has six different tones and nothing to do with our Latin languages.

Our mission is difficult – every start is difficult! But each day we pick up more and more, and move forward ‘step by step.’ Martin already presides at Mass in Vietnamese and has learnt to sing some songs.

Since we arrived the French speaking community here in Saigon has asked for some help. So sometimes, with the agreement of the Bishop, we celebrate Mass in French and enjoy meeting with young people.



While the beginning of our mission in Vietnam is promising we need to have great humility and patience. This is a country with a long tradition and a strong mindset, but so open to the message of the Gospel.

Vietnamese people, despite recent persecutions, have massively invested in their parishes. The Catholic Church attracts ever more adult baptisms and vocations to religious life.

In 2005 the country had 1500 seminarians, today 3000! It may just be that here the church is today enjoying its strongest growth.

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item 414

Amoris Laetitia

Amoris Laetitia – “*The joy of Love*” – is Pope Francis’ highly anticipated apostolic exhortation following the recent Synods on the Family which convened in the falls of 2014 and 2015. Those synods, which were meetings of bishops and laity from all over the world, met amidst great expectation and concern about the future of the family. This document is his reflection on the proceedings of those meetings. For while the delegates at the synods made many observations and recommendations, it was for Pope Francis to weigh in with the decisive conclusion to the proceedings.

So what has he given us? Francis has not made any significant changes to doctrine but the language and tone are notably inclusive and gentle. The Pope nowhere denies the validity of church doctrine. Rather he wants to revisit how it ought to be applied in a way that mercifully re-incorporates people into the church.



It contains an incredibly fragrant bouquet of scriptural exegesis, moral exhortation, theological analysis, spiritual discernment, pastoral reflection, and old-fashioned advice. One learns a great deal about the exhortation from its structure. The exhortation starts gradually and builds up to its central point, only then taking on the polemical and heated questions that engaged many onlookers.

In the introduction Francis notes that Chapters 4 and 5 are 'central'. They concern love. What comes before them is meant to lead into the discussion on love. Those chapters are on scripture, the experiences of family today, and doctrine. Thus, before the Pope moves to the core of the document, he has initiated a three-way dialogue between the Word of God, the world today, and church doctrine.

He acknowledges that families face tremendous difficulties in our time, but he also sees the continued witness to unconditional love that, despite the obstacles, so many families display. Indeed, emphasizing the difficulties of family life allows Francis to make a crucial point: "The Lord's presence dwells in real and concrete families, with all their daily troubles and struggles, joys and hopes". God is with all of us, not only the sinless. He calls us to perfection, but He also cares for us in our frailties and weakness. As the title of Chapter 8 indicates, the church is therefore called to accompany the weak, to discern with them and to integrate them into the church. It is only after those five initial chapters that Pope Francis moves to 'pastoral considerations', for which many anticipated the document. Most will be disappointed because on issues like contraception and abortion, and the refusal to recognize homosexual unions as in any way analogous to marriage, there are explicit re-affirmations of the church's teaching.

This apostolic exhortation does not pack the same papal punch as last year's environmental encyclical, yet it still carries the weight of his office and will certainly shape future church teaching. The document is noteworthy for one thing it advocates and for another it clearly rejects:

- it opens the door for some divorced and remarried Catholics to take Holy Communion, stating that the eucharist "is not a prize for the perfect, but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak", at the same time urging that priests should not behave like torturers in the confessional.
- it keeps the church door firmly closed on same-sex marriage.

He also admits that the church has made mistakes in alienating families and dedicates many passages to describing the pressures brought on families by poverty, migration, drug abuse and violence.

Just as he used his environmental encyclical *Laudato Si* to call on national governments to enact legislation to fight climate change, the Pope now calls for governments to provide support for families in the form of health care, education and employment. He describes families as under siege by the pressures of modern life.



With the publication of *Amoris Laetitia*, the task of pastors and other teachers of the faith is to present it within the context of the church's teaching and discipline, so that it serves to build up the Body of Christ in its first cell of life, which is marriage and the family. Christian marriage is not an idea; it is a sacrament which confers grace upon a man and woman to live in faithful, permanent and procreative love for each other. Every Christian couple who

validly marry receive, from the moment of their consent, the grace to live the love which they pledge to each other.

Pastoral intervention is often necessary today and, while the Holy Father is right to call for better and more intensive marriage preparation, pastors too need to be better trained to counsel those in 'complicated situations'. They need to not only understand what the Church teaches about marriage but also how to convey the implications of that teaching in charity. Pope Francis writes repeatedly throughout *Amoris Laetitia* that the family – husband (father), wife (mother), and children – is the reflection of the Holy Trinity here on earth.

It is most appropriate that this exhortation should emerge in the context of the *Year of Mercy*. As Francis writes: "We cannot forget that mercy is not only the working of the Father; it becomes a criterion for knowing who his true children are. In a word, we are called to show mercy because mercy was first shown to us".

He envisions the Spirit's grace of mercy being implanted in our hearts. Then in turn that merciful love will change – heal, deepen, elevate – all that we are and do. For then we will see, know and love as God does.

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