

23rd Sunday Year A Fathers' Day. A Reflection

Being Father's Day this Sunday I revisited the document of Pope Francis on the family entitled *Amoris Laetitia* [*The Joy of love*], released in April 2016 following on the 2015 Synod on the Family. What does *Amoris Laetitia* say about 'fathers'? Perhaps the basic point Pope Francis makes is simply "[that] every child has a right to receive love from a mother and a father". He comments that "both are necessary for a child's ... development."

The Holy Father briefly addressed the issue of fathers in contemporary society observing that "in our day, the problem no longer seems to be the overbearing presence of the father so much as his absence." Our Pontiff contrasts this situation with what is meant to be – the closeness of fathers to their wives and children. "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 ... And be close to his children as they grow." He goes on to say: "Some fathers feel they are useless ... but the fact is that children need to find a father waiting for them when they return home with their problems."

Pope Francis' remarks are in continuity with those of St John Paul II following the 1980 Synod on the family: "Where social and cultural conditions so easily encourage a father to be less concerned with his family efforts must be made to restore socially the conviction that the place and task of the father in and for the family is of unique and irreplaceable importance." What lies behind the statements of both popes is the vision of men and women being equal in dignity while possessing different gifts which enable them to complement each other in carrying out their roles in the family and in society.

We are all aware of the reforms of both the roles of spouses in the family and men and women in society that have taken place over the last 50 years. At their best, these reforms have overcome the often excessive differentiation or demarcation of roles of the sexes.

On the other hand we find in the writings of John Paul II and Francis the re-affirmation of the wisdom of the Christian tradition, grounded in the *Book of Genesis*, "male and female he created them". Fathers have a unique role to play in the family. Biological fatherhood is to be completed by social fatherhood. This weekend we remember our fathers, both living and dead, with gratitude, and pray for them.

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