

Praying For Marriage & Families



The Bishop Speaks

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, The Joy of Love, Pope Francis says “No family drops down from heaven perfectly formed.” (325) It was, I believe, one of the Pope’s key messages. It’s also one of the reasons the Catholic Bishops of Australia called upon all the faithful to undertake a month of prayer and fasting for marriage and families during the month of October. It’s also why many other Christian denominations and communities joined us in this effort too. Happy families require effort; happy families need prayer.

You see the Pope and the whole Church continue to present the beauty and perfection of God’s plan for marriage and the family as a community of life and love that reflects the very life and love of God himself in the Blessed Trinity. But we also know that the everyday lives of families can be rather messy affairs. You don’t need me, or anybody for that matter, to name all the things that can make our family life bumpy and difficult. Each of us just has to think of our own family situation!

But our family life is also beautiful. It’s where we

learn to love and to be loved; it’s where we learn to forgive and be forgiven; it’s where we learn to be patient and kind; and it’s where most of us receive the gift of faith. All this doesn’t happen in an instant; it takes time and it requires prayer. Pope Francis said it well in *Amoris Laetitia*, “I thank God that many families, which are far from considering themselves perfect, live in love, fulfil their calling and keep moving forward, even if they fall many times along the way.” (57)

I was delighted that so many Catholics and other Christians become one as we joined in the prayers and fasting for marriages and families during the month of October. There was a specific prayer theme for each of the four weeks of the month, a suggested prayer on that theme, and a call to undertake some little act of fasting to accompany our prayer, perhaps going without dessert or forgoing a favourite treat. As well as praying at Mass, many people took the prayer themes to the Lord Jesus in their Eucharistic adoration or sought Our Lady’s intercession in praying the Rosary. Many families also included the





prayer intentions in their regular family prayers.

In the first week we prayed for the flourishing of all marriages and families, and in the second week we prayed for those families that are in distress because of particular trials or difficulties.

For some time our society has become more aware and sensitive to the difficulties experienced by members of our families and community who are same-sex attracted or gender uncertain, and of the distress this can bring to families. So in the third week of October we prayed for the members of our families and community who experience same-sex attraction or gender uncertainty.

The increased awareness and sensitivity we have for our brothers and sisters who are same-sex attracted or gender uncertain is a good thing. Love of God and neighbour urge us to be patient and kind to all people, especially when they have greater need of our patience and kindness. Whether this should mean that marriage between a man and a woman must be redefined is another matter.

Because the family based on marriage is the very foundational institution of our whole society, the Catholic Church, along with many other people and organisations, believe that it shouldn't mean we have to redefine marriage. So in the final week of October we have been praying that our nation will engage in a respectful and fair national discussion on marriage with an outcome that will preserve God's beautiful plan for marriage.

Hearing Their Cry Pastoral Statement

Other members of our families and communities that really need our prayers are the victims and survivors of child sexual abuse. In September I attended the Public Hearing of the Royal Commission that examined the response of our Diocese to this situation. I was deeply moved by the testimony given by victims and survivors and their families. I heard of their horror, pain, fear and hurt. I heard of their betrayal, of their inhuman treatment, and of the torment they continue to suffer as the abuse has long lasting effects on their lives.

The treatment they received from the Church was appalling. They, and others who brought the matter into the open should have been encouraged to do so and should have been listened to. I and the Church owe them a debt of gratitude that they did bring this matter to everybody's attention for the sake and safety of children.

My Pastoral Statement *Hearing Their Cry* is my personal reflection following my attendance at the Royal Commission Hearing. It is reprinted in full in this edition of *Catholic Viewpoint*. It is my hope that by reading it you may come to an understanding of my own depth of sorrow and shame for the failings of our Church and Diocese. I know that many of you feel the sorrow and shame too.

In reading the Pastoral Statement I hope that you might also be informed of the many changes that have been taking place in the Diocese to ensure that our parishes are safe places for all the children and vulnerable in our care. Please take some time to read it and share it with others and please keep the victims in your prayers.

In September we were reminded of the sufferings of abuse victims. In October we were reminded of the importance of marriage and families. We cannot simply forget these special people now and move onto something else. Please keep praying for marriages, for families, and for victims of abuse, and keep them all close to your heart.

Most Reverend Michael Kennedy
Bishop of Armidale