

**LENTEN NOVENA 2026 – THE FAMILY OF GOD**  
HOLY REDEEMER PARISH – BERGVLIET, CAPE TOWN  
**LOVE IN MARRIAGE AND FAMILY**  
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*THURSDAY 5 MARCH 2026*

Text: 1COR. 13:4-7.

1. During the 60 years of my Redemptorist ministry there have been massive changes in our world -and even in our Church. And yet many things remain the same. Each of us is an example of that. So too is the topic of our Novena tonight: Love in Marriage and Family. Marriage and family life is still an institution which is both natural and divinely authorized, a holy calling in life.
2. When I was a theology student marriage was defined as a “**contract** by which 2 competent persons of opposite sex give to each other the exclusive and irrevocable right to their bodies for the procreation and education of children”. By the time I was ordained priest that definition had changed to speaking of marriage as a **sacred covenant of love** in which a man and a woman become one in a sacramental unity which is open to new life.
3. Pope St John Paul 2 began his pontificate with the resounding claim: “**Humans** (married or not) **cannot live without love**”. He went on to elaborate what was called “The theology of the Body” based on the **spousal meaning** of the body.
4. The most theological of modern popes, Benedict XV1, was the first pope to write (in ‘God is Love’) about the **erotic aspect of marriage**. He spoke of the true grandeur of erotic attraction and its role in married love.

5. Pope Francis devoted two Synods to the theme of Marriage and Family Life, one Extraordinary Synod in 2014 and an Ordinary Synod in 2015, followed by his Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love).
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The overriding passion of the life and ministry of Francis was to bring the love of God to every human being (married or not). His personal style was spontaneous, charismatic, informal. Sometimes this got him into trouble - even as pope, but his kindness and goodness prevailed.

Francis spoke about God's love as if possessed by it. His approach is helpfully summed up in three key attitudes:

\*Accompany

\*\*Discern

\*\*\*Integrate.

**ACCOMPANY** Remember his description of the Church as a "field hospital", always at the ready to save, to nurse, to restore, to give hope. Looking at the sad condition of many marriages, he wanted the Church to get involved in the messiness of ordinary life, to roll up its sleeves, and offer hope and a renewal of love. People who have been hurt by love need a special infusion of God's love in a human way.

**DISCERN** The logic of the Gospel is to pray over hurts and injuries and try to see problem from many angles.... To seek help/ talk things over, to discern how God wants everyone to be blessed, to grow in love, to enjoy life together. The logic of the Gospel is that **no person may be cast off, rejected or despised**, no matter what.

**Integrate:** Not everyone can live the ideals of marriage and family life at once or, perhaps, ever. But the gospel of **gradualness** allows everyone to live

the gospel as well as they can at this time. It may not be humanly possible to put things right immediately or indeed ever, but it is always possible to make a spiritual plan, to bring God into the situation. There are initial steps towards the ideal which can be taken right away. Pope Benedict spoke of ‘first steps’ even when the situation is dire. Love can find a way!

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In the wake of the publishing of THE JOY OF LOVE (AMORIS LAETITIA) the immediate attention was focussed on a footnote (351) in chapter 8 (par 305) on the possibility of admission to the sacraments for those who are divorced and remarried.

Pope Francis himself insisted that the real heart of his message is found in chapters 4 & 5. Most helpful of all are his comments on the well-known “love chapter” in **I Corinthians 13: 1-13**). Francis applies verses 4-7 to the daily love in marriage and in family life. It is a beautiful and fruitful meditation which might well be **read together by wife and husband**. The grace of the Word of God is there for married couples and families, irrespective whether the marriage or family is blissful or deeply troubled.

To ponder our own family life in terms of “patient, kind, gentle” etc is so refreshing. Francis praises the **restraint** needed for a family to live harmoniously, and he repeats his famous advice never to let the day end without making peace, not to ignore opportunities to say “Please”, “Thanks”, and “Excuse me”!.

Virtues are not just feelings/emotions. Justice, Peace, Patience etc do not depend on feelings. Neither does love. **Love** (therefore, married and family love) **is always more than a feeling**. It requires believing/trusting one another, hoping in one another, and the greatest of all, loving one another,

which means acting in love, making love. Francis' comments show that love in marriage and in family life is a reflection of the LOVE which is GOD.

In the same chapter (4) Francis, following Pope Benedict, addresses the question of **passion** in marriage. He sees the **erotic** as a specifically human manifestation of sexuality and therefore **a gift from God** which enriches the spouses in the wonder of their love. In this Pope Francis relies on St Thomas Aquinas who taught the holiness of conjugal intercourse and on St John Paul 2's teaching on the nuptial meaning of the Body.

This chapter concludes with significant acknowledgement that the longer life-span of people today can bring new issues to the fore in marriage and in family life. The aging process can strengthen the life-long love between spouses, but it can also bring new challenges and burdens.

The underlying vocation to live as one, no matter the ages or conditions of the spouses, reflects the unendable love of the Divine Family of God.

The Gospel of Jesus our Christ has been summed up by the saying: at the end of life, we will be judged by love.

The greatest mystery of all is **LOVE** because **GOD IS LOVE**.