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The family in the age of pandemics – topicality of the message of the exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*

Rodzina w dobie pandemii –
aktualność przesłania adhortacji *Amoris laetitia*

Abstract

The time of the pandemic is a hard test for the family ties. In the face of the difficulties and threats experienced by the families today, the Church reminds spouses about the value of a marriage, which is God's intention, the fruit of grace and a vocation that must be fully experienced, with fidelity and selflessness. The aim of the research was to present the topicality of the message of the exhortation Amoris laetitia in the context of contemporary events caused by the SARS-Cov-2 virus and underlining the importance of the Church's tenderness in accompaniment, discreet and full of love, for today's families. The analytical-synthetic method was used in the work on the text. As a result of the analysis of the content of the exhortation, not so much its topicality was emphasized, but rather the meticulous care for family life in many aspects. Pope Francis, giving specific examples, talks about the topicality of the vocation of the Christian family and the challenges that families had to face during the pandemic. The following conclusion can be drawn from these considerations: each family member, regardless of age or sex, plays an important role in social relations, and in the prose of life, the azimuth of actions should be marked by the 'Hymn of love' by St. Paul.

Keywords: Family, the pandemic, Pope Francis, exhortation Amoris Laetitia.

Abstrakt

Czas pandemii to ciężka próba dla więzi rodzinnych. W obliczu trudności i zagrożeń, jakich doświadczają współcześnie rodziny, Kościół przypomina małżonkom o wartości małżeństwa, które jest zamysłem Bożym, owocem łaski i powołaniem, które trzeba przeżywać w pełni, z wiernością i bezinteresownością. Celem badań było przedstawienie aktualności przesłania *adhortacji Amoris laetitia* w kontekście współczesnych wydarzeń wywołanych wirusem SARS-Cov-2 oraz podkreślenie, jak ważna dla współczesnych rodzin jest czułość w towarzystwie, dyskretna i pełna miłości ze strony Kościoła. W pracy nad tekstem zastosowano metodę analityczno-syntetyczną. W wyniku analizy treści *adhortacji* podkreślono nie tyle jej aktualność, ile wręcz drobiazgową troskę o życie rodzinne w wielu aspektach. Papież Franciszek, podając konkretne przykłady, mówi o aktualności powołania rodziny chrześcijańskiej oraz wyzwaniach, z którymi musiały zmierzyć się rodziny w okresie pandemii. Z owych rozważań nasuwa się następujący wniosek: każdy członek rodziny, bez względu na wiek czy płeć, pełni ważną funkcję w relacjach społecznych, a w prozie życia azymut działań wyznaczać winien „Hymn o miłości” autorstwa św. Pawła.

Słowa kluczowe: rodzina, pandemia, papież Franciszek, *adhortacja Amoris laetitia*.

Introduction

The pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus has become “(...) a severe examiner of the social, religious, moral and economic condition of the modern generation” (Mroczkowski, 2020, p. 49). The time of the pandemic is also a hard test for family ties. However, it is in the family that the strongest set point and the strongest support for the whole society can be found because, as Pope Francis writes, “the welfare of the family is decisive for the future of the world and that of the Church” (Francis, 2016, no. 31).

In the Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis emphasizes that there are two attitudes which are the essence of the pastoral care of families: the proclamation of the Gospel and tenderness in accompanying. In the face of difficulties and threats faced by families today, the Church reminds spouses of the value of a marriage, which is a God’s intention, the fruit of grace and vocation that must be lived fully, with fidelity and selflessness.

The purpose of this text is to recall the topicality of the message of the exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* in the context of contemporary events caused by the SARS-Cov-2 virus. It focuses on Christian values of a marriage, which must be lived with fidelity and selflessness. It emphasizes how important is tenderness in accompanying for today’s families, discreet and full of ecclesial love. It reminds instructions

of Pope Francis, who said that the family, living in the image and likeness of God's love, becomes Love itself. The article also mentions family relationships through which children learn to love and practice their faith every day.

The first part of the text talks about an extraordinary situation caused by the coronavirus pandemic, in which a society imbued with exuberant individualism was faced. Afterwards, the topicality of the Christian family vocation was discussed. In the opinion of the Holy Father, the family should discern all the information flowing from various means of social communication in a critical way, create some space for the realization of interpersonal relations, especially with the elderly and the sick. The last paragraph discusses the problems that families had to face in the SARS-CoV-2 era. This includes, among others, unequal distribution of duties between spouses who are simultaneously involved in a remote job, household duties and childcare; problems resulting from difficult housing conditions or issues related to the domestic violence increase.

1. The pandemic dark tunnel

Statistics on the number of cases and deaths due to SARS-CoV-2 virus have been presented continuously for two years by media around the world. Additionally, this information is accompanied by showing the number of dismissals, bankruptcy, redundancies, compulsory isolation or quarantine. We got used to the fact that in our everyday life we are accompanied by: masks, hand sanitizer and social distance (https://kkr.krakow.pl/dla_rodzin/245771,1827,komunikat,problemy_rodzin_w_obliczu_pandemii.html). Over 700 days of the pandemic have completely changed the reality we know. During this time, economy was halted on a global scale, social relations were modified, and the education system was revolutionized (<https://portal.librus.pl/rodzina/artykuly/raport-sytuacja-pracujacych-rodzicow-w-czasie-pandemii>). This time forced many families to reformulate the model of functioning: households became space for the execution of educational, social and upbringing duties. Parents took over the role of teachers, educators, and companions in their children's play, while facing the necessity to pursue their own professional goals and their adaptation to a changed reality (Ambroziak, 2021).

The situation faced by the societies on a global scale was described by Pope Francis as "the pandemic dark tunnel" (<https://deon.pl/czytelnia/co-papiez-franciszek-sadzi-o-pandemii-koronawirusa,1320455>). In the interview with Domenico Agasso, the Pope said that "pain and suffering forced the door of our houses, invaded our thoughts, attacked our dreams and plans. There is no one

who can afford to live peacefully today. The world will never be the same again (...) A pandemic is an emergency signal that forces a man to reflect. Therefore, this time of a trial can become a time of wise and far-sighted choices for the benefit of a mankind. All the humanity. “ (<https://deon.pl/czytelnia/co-papiez-franciszek...>). According to the Holy Father, it is necessary to revolutionize the priorities and rethink the hierarchy of values, all of that in order to survive this difficult, pandemic time with the strength of faith and the passion of love. In the opinion of Pope Francis, “we are at a crucial moment for humanity, threatened not only by covid, but also by another terrible virus that may turn out to be more deadly: the virus of selfishness” ([https:// deon.pl/czytelnia/co-papiez-franciszek...](https://deon.pl/czytelnia/co-papiez-franciszek...)). In the exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, the Pope reminds that “(...) it is easy nowadays to confuse genuine freedom with the idea that each individual can act arbitrarily, as if there were no truths, values and principles to provide guidance, and everything were possible and permissible”. (Francis, 2016, no. 34). Sui generis of antidote to the above “virus of egoism” is the Christian family, in the center of which love is located, which “(...) involves mutual self-giving, includes and integrates the sexual and affective dimensions, in accordance with God’s plan” (Francis, 2016 , no. 67).

The Covid-19 pandemic has radically changed people’s everyday lives. In an unknown, pandemic situation, we have new responsibilities, which include wearing masks, social distance, hand disinfection, and the necessity to vaccinate (Lahikainen, 2021). It is difficult to correlate this fact with the public ideology of modern times, in which “(...) everything depends on you and only you, you do not owe anything to anyone, and others do not owe you anything” (Markiewicz, 2020). According to Tomasz Markiewicz, we are all “self entrepreneurs” who manage their lives in a rational and self-sufficient way (Markiewicz, 2020). In the opinion of many sociologists, philosophers and political scientists, the coronavirus pandemic has exposed the absurdity of this individualistic vision of the world. In fact, a man is a social being whose decisions influence others and vice versa. However, it is worth mentioning that Pope Francis had already referred to the problem of exuberant individualism a couple of years earlier. This exuberant extreme individualism degenerates family ties, leads to the situation when the individual family members are treated as a lonely island ruled by intolerance and aggression. According to Pope Francis, the modern world is not conducive to the durability of decisions: stress, pace of life, uncertainty of tomorrow are cultural factors that characterize the post-industrial, pre-pandemic world. It seems that the observations contained in *Amoris Laetitia*’s exhortation during the pandemic are gaining in importance: “(...) it is easy nowadays to confuse genuine freedom with the idea that each individual can act arbitrarily, as if there were

no truths, values and principles to provide guidance, and everything was possible and permissible” (Francis, 2016, no. 34). In this sense, the idea of a marriage based on undying love, exclusivity and stability takes the dimension of a notion or archaism. Escape from obligations, comfort or arrogance better harmonize with contemporary, also pandemic, ideology (Francis, 2016, no. 33).

According to many sociologists, coronavirus pandemic, has become a global plague of the 21st century, which leads to high mortality, elicits public fear of health, economic and social consequences. (Długosz 2021). According to the data from February 13, 2022, the number of COVID-19 cases is over 412 million. During that time, there were over 5.8 million deaths worldwide (<https://news.google.com/covid19/map?hl=pl&mid=%2Fm%2F02j71&gl=PL&ceid=PL%3Apl> 2021). There is a bitter truth about the pandemic: sick people die alone. In such a dramatic situation, there is neither a place for dying with dignity, nor for farewell from families or relatives (<https://www.rp.pl/diagnostyka-i-terapie/art375811-wsparcie-dla-osob-ktore-stracily-w-pandemic-close-person> 2020). Moreover, at the beginning of the pandemic, there was no question of “standard” funeral ceremonies. The burial took place in a hurry, without mourners, without exchanging memories or soothing embraces. Until recently, Western civilization seemed to have wiped the death phenomenon or treated it in a purely rational manner. In the era of the coronavirus pandemic, according to Silke Bartlick, the death decided to regain its rightful place in the public space (Bartlick 2020).

Pope Francis wrote in the exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* about the extraordinary situation in which “(...) death sticks its sting” (Francis, 2016, no. 253). In situations where the family life is confronted with the death of a loved one, every effort should be made to soothe the pain and suffering. According to the Holy Father, “to turn our backs on a grieving family would show a lack of mercy, mean the loss of a pastoral opportunity, and close the door to other efforts at evangelization” (Francis, 2016, no. 253). In the opinion of the Bishop of Rome, a period of mourning is a long process, during which there are many questions about what could have been done? how could you help? what did the person experience before their death? It would seem that a sincere and a patient way of experiencing grief may be a panacea for the masses who lost a loved one in the coronavirus pandemic. Importantly, “at particular times, we have to help the grieving person to realize that, after the loss of a loved one, we still have a mission to carry out, and that it does us no good to prolong the suffering, as if it were a form of tribute” (Francis, 2016, no. 255). The deceased, *de facto*, does not need grief, tears or suffering. The permanent attachment to the past, which door was closed at the time of the death of a loved one, will not bring any good. During mourning, the awareness

of the fact that there is no complete destruction of those who have passed away is comforting to us. As Pope Francis claims, it is the faith in God's resurrection that makes us aware that "our loved ones are not lost in the shades of nothingness; hope assures us that they are in the good strong hands of God" (Francis, 2016, no. 256). Acceptance of the ubiquitous death in the pandemic, will paradoxically allow us to prepare for it. In this way, we will also prepare ourselves to meet our deceased loved ones on the day when „there will be no death anymore. Neither mourning nor cry nor hardship" (Rev 21: 4). For, as we read in the exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, "the better we live on this earth, the greater the happiness we will be able to share with our loved ones in heaven. The more we are able to mature and develop in this world, the more gifts will we be able to bring to the heavenly banquet" (Francis, 2016, no. 258).

2. The current vocation of the Christian family

The pandemic is the time when many challenges and threats to the modern families appeared. The most important one includes "the intensification of the media promoting their own value systems" (Siewiora 2021, p. 98). A manifestation of these activities is the process of families secularization which, due to the pandemic restrictions, either gave up many forms of religious activities or supported themselves by the media for this purpose. In this situation, the real world was replaced by the reality created by the media, "(...) making available not only the expanding market of ideas, but also ways of interpreting the value and meaning of life" (Siewiora 2021). During the pandemic, the activity of the parish was significantly limited, contacts with the clergy were minimized and the limits of the worshipers during the Eucharist and services were introduced (Zaręba, Mariański, 2021, p. 35). Consequently, the pandemic time made that the search for a new spirituality began, in which subjectivization of faith, anti-dogmaticism or freedom from religious structures have primacy. It is worth mentioning that already in the exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis wrote that "The Church is a family of families (...) The Church is good for the family, and the family is good for the Church" (Francis, 2016, no. 87). According to the Pope, the family good is crucial for the future of the world and the Church (Francis, 2016, no. 31). The sacrament of a marriage, which is the solid foundation of the Christian family, is neither a social contract nor a ritual reflecting a symbol of engagement. The family becomes a good for the Church with all its effects. The love that flourishes in the families is a constant source of strength for both the life of the Church and the whole society (Francis, 2016, no. 88).

The parents' role, in the face of all pandemic restrictions, seems invaluable. The social lockdown caused that the world of values had been closed within four walls. At this point the range of parents' actions expands. Parents who "(...) always influence the moral development of their children, for better or for worse" (Francis, 2016, no. 259) is highlighted. The family, as the Holy Father reminds us, "(...) is the primary setting for socialization, since it is where we first learn to relate to others, to listen and share, to be patient and show respect, to help one another and live as one" (Francis, 2016, no. 276). According to the Pope, tendencies that developed in the early childhood remain throughout our life "(...) either as attractions to a particular value or a natural repugnance to certain ways of acting" (Francis, 2016, no. 274). Raising children is a process by which faith and values are passed on. The complexity of today's world, overload of information, pace of life, and ubiquitous consumerism are a real problem. However, as Pope Francis writes in his exhortation, "(...) the home must continue to be the place where we learn to appreciate the meaning and beauty of the faith, to pray and to serve our neighbor" (Francis, 2016, no. 287).

During the global lockdown, when the television, radio or the Internet were the only "window to the world", the Bishop of Rome reminds that the family is the environment that should also teach to discern in a critical way the message flowing from the various means of social communication. As the author of the exhortation admits with sadness "(...) some television programs or forms of advertising often negatively influence and undercut the values inculcated in family life" (Francis, 2016, no. 274). In the opinion of the Holy Father, parents should accept this inevitable, great responsibility as soon as possible, so that they can fulfill it consciously, properly and with full commitment. The words of Pope Francis, who says directly that "families cannot help but be places of support, guidance and direction, however much they may have to rethink their methods and discover new resources" (Francis, 2016, no. 260) seem to be significant at the time of the pandemic.

The pandemic changed the way many families functioned, they began to live in their own circle, complying with the necessary isolation from closer or more distant family members, friends and acquaintances. For a long time, a lot of people, met only with the members of their immediate family, and this fact generated many social problems. Over this time, the family became the only community that enabled the realization of interpersonal relations, "(...) which, on the one hand, could serve to deepen and strengthen the ties between its members, but on the other - it also became a source of conflicts and fatigue with mutual presence" (Siewiora 2021, 96). After all, a well-known African proverb says that it takes a whole village to raise a child. The term „a whole village" means

adults – members of a close or extended family, friends or neighbours who are obliged to take part in the process of growing up their relatives. In the era of the pandemic, the words of the Holy Father about the effects of isolating the nuclear family from grandparents, uncles, cousins or neighbours gain their significance. According to Pope Francis, “this greater family may have members who require assistance, or at least companionship and affection, or consolation amid suffering”. Individualism, so ubiquitous especially during the pandemic, “(...) can lead to creating small nests of security, where others are perceived as bothersome or a threat” (Francis, 2016, no. 187). Unfortunately, despite common approval, the isolation does not bring peace or happiness, on the contrary: it closes the hearts of individual family members, thus depriving them of wider life and social perspectives.

The Pope emphasizes that proper intergenerational relations are a guarantee of the future. Verification of the intergenerational relations has happened practically from the beginning of the pandemic, especially in the case of elderly people who, due to intercurrent diseases (heart or lung diseases, diabetes, oncological treatment), are more exposed to coronavirus infections than other age groups (Arbaje, 2020). Many gerontologists say directly that isolation and social distancing have an impact on the well-being and mental health of older people. In addition, scant social relations are more and more often noted among the causes of death, and this ratio is equal to or higher than obesity or lung diseases (Heid A., Cartwright F., Wilson-Genderson M., Pruchno R, 2020). For that reason, the message of Pope Francis seems to be current, as he says that it is necessary to awaken a collective sense of gratitude, appreciation and hospitality, thanks to which the elderly will feel a living part of the community (Francis, 2016, no. 191). After all, as the the Holy Father emphasizes that we are all somebody’s children, and this fact “(...) we did not give ourselves life but that we received it. The great gift of life is the first gift that we received” (Francis, 2016, no. 188). These elders are all “fathers and mothers, who came before us on our own road, in our own house, in our daily battle for a worthy life” (Francis, 2016, no. 191). The need to care for intergenerational relations, especially during the pandemic, is the essence of our civilization, because “(...) a family that fails to respect and cherish its grandparents, who are its living memory, is already in decline” (Francis, 2016, no. 193). Families need awareness, “(...) that history did not begin with them, that they are now part of an age old pilgrimage and that they need to respect all that came before them” (Francis, 2016, no. 192).

The family plays an educational role, which in the opinion of Pope Francis, means commanding a sense of the world and society, developing the competence of the students to stay outside home. In the immediate family structures

“we break out of our fatal self absorption and come to realize that we are living with and alongside others who are worthy of our concern, our kindness and our affection” (Francis, 2016, no. 276). Cross-generational education is applicable, for example, in the face of illness of individual family members. The Holy Father reminds that “(...) in the face of illness, even in families, difficulties arise due to human weakness. But in general, times of illness enable family bonds to grow stronger... An education that fails to encourage sensitivity to human illness makes the heart grow cold; it makes young people ‘anesthetized’ to the suffering of others, incapable of facing suffering and of living the experience of limitation” (Francis, 2016, no. 277). Difficult moments, which there are many during the pandemic, are of great educational importance, teaching, for example, the principles of community, diminishing selfish beliefs and degrading consumption habits.

3. Challenges for families in the time of a pandemic

The pandemic has changed almost every aspect of the society, including the way people work, get education, and fulfill their professional and social obligations. The coronavirus caused that a lot of adults around the world started to perform their professional duties remotely at home. At the same time, the closure of schools and kindergartens caused that the process of education, organization of games and free time was closed within four walls. According to the studies, these additional pandemic burdens fell on mothers disproportionately (Hall, 2021). The scenario of sharing household chores seems to be imbued with gender inequality: remotely working mothers were the only ones responsible for most of the housework and childcare (Dunatchik, Gerson, & Glass, 2021). According to the research of the Pew Research Center from the pandemic period, only 38% of women are satisfied with the division of household chores, compared to over 55% of men. Another area where gender patterns have changed during the pandemic is the view on how spouses / partners balance work and personal life. Among adults living in a marriage or cohabiting with a working spouse or a partner, men (48%) more often than women (40%) are very satisfied with this aspect of their relationship (Barroso, 2021). Sarah Brown, the president of Theirworld, said the pandemic could reverse women’s equality by up to 10 years (Collins, 2021).

The issue of unequal distribution of the household duties did not go unnoticed by the Holy Father a few years before the outbreak of the pandemic. On the pages of *Amoris Laetitia*’s exhortation, the Pope declared “through an equitable

distribution of duties, responsibilities and tasks; indeed, a greater emphasis on personal communication between the spouses helps to make family life more humane” (Francis, 2016, no. 32). Speaking of the duties that rest on the shoulders of wives and mothers, it should be emphasized that over years a lot has been done to recognize the women’s rights and their participation in public life. It is worth mentioning that Pope Francis looks at the situation of women not only through the prism of domestic duties. He mentions the use of violence (verbal, physical and sexual) in marital relations, harassment and various forms of slavery. Difficult and painful stories of women, according to the Holy Father, “history is burdened by the excesses of patriarchal cultures that considered women inferior” (Francis, 2016, no. 54). Recognition of women’s rights, not only in the home space, but also in a social perspective, is not the result of women’s emancipation. The Bishop of Rome emphasizes that this argument is a form of sexism. It is the family where the mutual cooperation should be developed and overcome old forms of discrimination. Moreover, the role of men in the family life should include supporting women. Specific properties of male character seriously mark the organization of family life and the process of raising children (Francis, 2016, no. 55). In the opinion of Pope Francis, in Western societies the figure of father is symbolic, distorted, absent, faded. Only a few decades ago, families in post-industrial societies struggled with the phenomena of depotism or oppression, in which fathers acted as rulers, representatives of the law who imposed power and were the censors of children’s happiness. As we read in the exhortation “yet (...) one goes from one extreme to the other. In our day, the problem no longer seems to be the overbearing presence of the father so much as his absence, his not being there. Fathers are often so caught up in themselves and their work, and at times in their own self-fulfillment, that they neglect their families” (Francis, 2016, no. 176). The presence of the father in the family and his authority builds the sense of value of other members in the prose of everyday life, in joy, pain, hardship and hope (Francis, 2016, no. 177).

The issue of housing conditions seems to be crucial in coping with the rush of household duties during the pandemic. It is worth quoting the results of a research conducted by Agnieszka Sadowska confirming that the housing conditions affect the quality of life and comfort during a quarantine. Sadowska noticed that since real estates had become a place of study and work, physical activity and a place for spending free time, many of them turned out to be unfit and unprepared for these purposes. In case of many respondents, the mood worsened the longer they stayed at home and the duration of the pandemic increased. The reason for difficulties in maintaining good family relations during the pandemic was usually noise, which caused distraction during remote work or lessons

(Sadowa, 2020). In the course of the conducted research, it was noticed that an important factor was the location of the inhabited property: “for children and their parents (...) access to safe green areas turned out to be crucial” (Sadowa, 2020). According to Agnieszka Sadowska, the “luxury” during the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic was having a balcony, a terrace or a yard.

As the Holy Father emphasizes in the Exhortation, “the family has the right to decent housing, fitting for family life and commensurate to the number of the members, in a physical environment that provides the basic services for the life of the family and the community” (Francis , 2016, no. 44). In the opinion of Pope Francis, family and home are two elements that demand each other because the family is a good and there is no society that can do without. The Bishop of Rome reminds us that “the family is a good (...) and it ought to be protected. The Church has always held it part of her mission to promote marriage and the family and to defend them against those who attack them” (Francis, 2016, no. 44).

The coronavirus pandemic has dramatically shaken the lives of families around the world, causing rising unemployment, school closings and a stay-at-home commandment. These disruptions and stress constitute a serious risk related to the increase in domestic violence, including children: “(...) the pandemic has caused a greater risk of violence (...), especially among families where violence had occurred before the pandemic and families experiencing stress and lack of economic stability, e.g. unexpected job losses due to the worsening economic situation” (Lawson, Piel, Simon 2021). Due to the restrictions, relatives living in a violent relationship spend more time together, and the victims have limited contact with people they could turn to for help (Boserup, McKenney, Elkbuli 2020). According to the World Health Organization, 1 in 3 women in the world experience physical and / or sexual violence by their husbands / partners / loved ones, and this phenomenon intensifies especially during crisis situations, including a pandemic (World Health Organization 2020).

Verifying the validity of the message of the *Amoris Laetitia* exhortation, it seems necessary to emphasize that the use of any forms of violence against women has been described as “unacceptable customs” (Francis, 2016, no. 54). In the opinion of the Holy Father, shameful acts of violence against women, the phenomenon of harassment in the family and other forms of violence against the family members are the signs of cowardly degradation of a male strength. The fact of using violence against the closest family members is a manifestation of the patriarchy culture in which women are considered as second-class people (Francis, 2016, no. 54). In the opinion of the Bishop of Rome, various forms of domination, arrogance, exploitation, persuasion or sexual violence

cannot be ignored or kept hidden (Francis, 2016, no. 153). Pope Francis not only clearly outlines his attitude towards any forms of domestic violence, but also emphasizes that patience can be an alternative to control your impulses. Obviously, "being patient does not mean letting ourselves be constantly mistreated, tolerating physical aggression or allowing other people to use us" (Francis, 2016, no. 92). The point is not to put yourself, your problems and emotions in the center, not to expect that it will always be the way you want it in every situation. With such an attitude everything will lead to aggressive reactions or outbursts of anger.

The SARS-CoV-2 virus has proven to be devastating in terms of both physical and mental health, economy area and lifestyle (Woods, Hutchinson, Powers, Roberts *et al.* 2020). According to Monika Dąbkowska, „the constant need to stay at home (...) online learning, the loss of direct social bonds may cause a greater psychological burden than possible physical suffering caused by this pandemic” (Dąbkowska, 2021, p. 151). The necessity to limit social relationships to home conditions has contributed to the emergence of a variety of neuropsychiatric symptoms and has resulted in a psychosocial stigma. The sudden need to stay at home involved a radical change in a lifestyle, a restriction of physical and cognitive activities (Dąbkowska, p. 152). In the process of various studies conducted in the era of a pandemic, the concept of „a psychological crisis intervention model emerges” (Talevi, Socci, Carai, Carnaghi *et al.* 2020). It seems that, being aware of the huge crisis, parents, in cooperation with educators, psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers, should be in good terms and take actions to fight for the proper psychophysical condition of children and adolescents. However, in the face of COVID-19, access to basic medical services and minimizing educational inequalities turned out to be the top priorities.

The above crisis, the effects of which will be experienced in the coming years, fell on the shoulders of parents, educators and the closest family members. The exhortation, needless to say, does not directly address the emergencies caused by the coronavirus pandemic. However, the Holy Father perceives the family as a battlefield against all kinds of crises, as it constitutes its dramatic beauty. According to Pope Francis, “life together should not diminish but increase their contentment; every new step along the way can help couples find new ways to happiness” (Francis, 2016, no. 232). Intrafamily relationships do not lose their intensity in the face of a crisis, on the contrary: the crisis leads to their improvement, consolidation and maturity. Every crisis situation is a lesson which gives us the opportunity to learn about new meanings of the marital experience. In the face of the most severe crisis, one must not give up, on the contrary: „when marriage is seen as a challenge that involves over-

coming obstacles, each crisis becomes an opportunity to let the wine of their relationship age and improve” (Francis, 2016, no. 232). As the Pope underlines, any crisis situation ultimately has good news behind it, which must be heard by listening to our hearts.

4. The conclusion

There are many difficult thematic threads in the post-synodal exhortation of Pope Francis *Amoris Laetitia* that have to be faced by the couples and families in the modern world. Although the document was published almost 4 years before the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, its message seems to be extremely valid. In the Exhortation, the Holy Father tries to show the positive side of conjugal love in such a way that the spouses themselves discover its various aspects, because “(...) love is a personal act and a mutual gift. It has many dimensions (...) Love in the sacrament of a marriage matures throughout life until death. It requires a lot of sacrifice and forgiveness in order to go through the inevitable crises” (Ozorowski, 2017, p. 26).

The question of the topicality of the message of the exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* can be answered in the words of the “Letter to the Corinthians” which Pope Francis refers to (see 1 Cor 13:4-7). In the opinion of the Holy Father, the hymn by St. Paul presents the true features of the conjugal love, which improves the everyday life of the spouses and their family members, allowing them to overcome all the hardships, disputes, crisis situations, extraordinary circumstances (Francis, 2016, no. 90). It is written in the exhortation that in the prose of life, there is the necessity to remember that love is patient, does not seek any applause and is not prideful, commands to do good, means the will to be loved by others, prompts to selfless actions, requires readiness to forgive and believes everything (Francis, 2016, no. 91–114). These guidelines, perhaps obvious to the Christian perspective, determine the course of action for the families facing the difficult reality caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

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