

THE JOY OF LOVE This past week, the Holy Father Pope Francis issued an Apostolic Letter entitled "The Joy of Love." the document is a summation of last year's synod on the family in which many bishops across the world participated, including Cardinal Timothy Dolan. During this special meeting of the bishops along with the Pope, an effort was made to re-focus and realign Catholic teaching on marriage and the family with the modern world. While the teachings of Jesus Christ and His Gospel can never be compromised, the intent of the Papal Letter I believe is primarily a pastoral one. Pope Francis is above all a very good pastor who would like to guide the church and her faithful along the right way which is not an easy thing to do in this morally topsy turvy world that is 2016. Now, I will admit to you that I have not read the Pope's letter but skimmed through it briefly online. One of the "Big Ticket" issues that the news media has been trumpeting constantly is the plight of divorced Catholics and their reception of Holy Communion. The other day I watched a CBS news report about Poe Francis' letter and the commentator got it all wrong! He stated rather definitely that divorced persons cannot receive the Eucharist. But that statement is absolutely false. As long as a divorced person is not remarried, he or she is not cut off from Holy Communion. So a bit of clarification is needed. I am intrigued by the title of the Pope's letter-"The Joy of Love." Love is one of those words that we use constantly in our society. Unfortunately, we Americans have only one word for love. The Greeks had three words to express love. One was "Philia" which meant a kind of brotherly type of love. This word is where "Philadelphia" derives , its name -The City of Brotherly Love. Then there is the word "Eros" which signifies sexual love. Finally, the Greeks used the word "Agape" to describe a deeper type of sacrificial love. It is this last type of love that is missing from so many marriages today. To love really means to sacrifice for one another. Somebody said to me once, "Father, love is blind but marriage is the opener!" How true. Real love has to endure beyond the honeymoon stage. Pope Francis, like any good priest and pastor recognizes the reality that here is a good deal of selfishness that has to be overcome in a marriage on the part of both husband and wife. If couples truly love one another, there will be no difficulties or hurdles that they cannot surmount over the span of a lifetime. Pope Francis writes: "In the course of every marriage, physical appearances change, but this hardly means that love and attraction need fade. We love the other person for who they are, not simply for their body. Although the body ages, it still expresses that personal identity that first won the heart." I think that the Holy Father is on to something here! The true joy of love comes when we get out of our self-centeredness and reach out to others in generosity and sacrifice. Yes, sacrifice can be difficult, but a true and sincere love can make it easy. At Mass this Sunday, let's pray for all married couples, may their love and happiness deepen with the passing of each day!

Sincerely in Christ,

Father Jerome