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The Conjugal *Communio Amoris* as the Path to Holiness: Perspective of the Exhortation “*Familiaris Consortio*”

Zakonska communio amoris kot pot do svetosti: pogled spodbude „Familiaris consortio“

Abstract: The issues of conjugal *communio amoris* and the implications of this relationship in Christian marriage, i.e., the path to holiness, are the subject of this paper. *Communio amoris* in relation to marriage and family comes from the theological thought of John Paul II, from the “*Familiaris Consortio*” exhortation. In three parts of the paper, there are presented in turn: conjugal communion of love, conjugal love as the fruit of that communion, and *communio sanctorum* - holiness in marriage as the realization of the communion of love. The history of the Church shows that the holiness of spouses was practiced “despite” marriage, “in” marriage and “thanks to” marriage. However, a special emphasis in this paper is placed on the third model. *Communio amoris* is the principle of sanctification for spouses entering into a sacramental union; it is the path to *communio sanctorum*.

Keywords: the communion of love, communion of persons, communion of saints, theology of love, psychology of love, marital sanctity

Povzetek: Tema prispevka je vprašanje zakonske *communio amoris* (občestvo ljubezni) in posledice takšnega odnosa (to je pot do svetosti) v krščanskem zakonu. *Communio amoris* v razmerju do zakona in družine izhaja iz teološke misli Janeza Pavla II. oziroma iz spodbude „*Familiaris consortio*“. V treh delih prispevka so predstavljeni zakonsko občestvo ljubezni, zakonska ljubezen kot sad tega občestva in *communio sanctorum* (občestvo svetnikov) – svetost v zakonu kot uresničitev občestva ljubezni. Zgodovina Cerkve kaže, da je bila svetost zakoncev uresničevana ‚kljub‘ zakonu, ‚v‘ zakonu in ‚po zaslugi‘ zakona. Prispevek posebej poudarja tretji model. *Communio amoris* je načelo posvečevanja za zakonce, ki vstopijo v zakramentalno zvezo – je pot do *communio sanctorum*.

Ključne besede: občestvo ljubezni, občestvo oseb, občestvo svetnikov, teologija ljubezni, psihologija ljubezni, zakonska svetost

1. Introduction

Last year marked the 40th anniversary of the announcement of the apostolic exhortation of John Paul II on the tasks of the Christian family in the modern world of “*Familiaris Consortio*” (November 22, 1981). In this document, two key phrases are used in relation to marriage: *communio personarum* and *communio amoris*. The first one appears many times in the exhortation. It has been extensively described by researchers in the past forty years and clearly functions in awareness and theological reflection. The second term seems to be forgotten in literature. Just as man as such cannot live without love, so also the family cannot live, develop, and perfect itself without love (FC 18). Love is, therefore, the foundation and strength of the conjugal and family community - the “communion of persons” (John Paul II 1986, 67). The paper deals with the problem of *communio amoris* (communion of love) in sacramental marriage and its relationship with the realization of holiness (*communio sanctorum*). The history of the Church, however, shows that married couples elevated to the altars as saints and as blessed are not numerous. Ferdinand Holböck in his publication collected 142 cases of God’s servants, blessed and holy spouses in the history of the Church. The author also included in this group the marriages shown in the Holy Scriptures (Holböck 2004). Zbigniew Nosowski, in turn, indicated 84 married couples raised to the altars as blessed or saints. More than half of them are holy martyrs (Nosowski 2010).

The teaching of the Catholic Church clearly indicates the holy sacraments as a path of sanctification of a person, as an effective way to achieve holiness. “The purpose of the sacraments is to sanctify men, to build up the Body of Christ and, finally, to give worship to God. Because they are signs they also instruct.” (CCC 1123; SC 59) However, the article does not address this general relationship, that is, the sacrament of marriage and marital holiness, but the more specific relationship of *communio amoris* and spousal holiness.

The look at *communio amoris*, at marital love as a signpost of striving for holiness, is a novelty in this study. In the paper the characteristics of the internal gift of the Holy Spirit, that is, the *communio amoris*, the external aspect of that gift, that is, the conjugal love and the implications of this relationship in a Christian marriage, i.e., the sanctity of the spouses’ lives are presented. The aforementioned elements of the triad in marriage: *communio amoris*, conjugal love, and *communio sanctorum* have different distinctions that clearly distinguish these formulations. Thus, they are different realities, although together they constitute a logical entity.

The problem question concerning the issues discussed concerns the role of *communio amoris* and marital love in the realization of holiness. The research method of understanding the communion of love and marital love is the analysis of the literature on the subject.

2. *Communio Amoris* in the “Familiaris Consortio” Exhortation¹

John Paul II in the “Familiaris Consortio” exhortation uses the terms *communio amoris* or *amoris communitas* (Plezia 1998, 612; 614) several times in relation to marriage and family. Although both expressions have the same meaning and do not show any fundamental semantic differences, they are used in different contexts. *Communio amoris*, however, cannot be separated and understood without reference to the very definition of *communio* and *communio personarum*. Karol Wojtyła, in his analysis of the concepts of “communion” and “community,” indicates that everything that is behind the first concept can only be realized by a person endowed with reason and free will, endowed with an ability to create relationships. There is an unequivocal indication of the likeness of the human being to God (Wojtyła 1974, 350). “There is a difference between the statement that a man, while being a person, is also social in nature, and the statement that attributes to a man-person a giftedness for community understood as *communio*. This does not mean that the two concepts are opposed to each other. On the contrary, it can even be argued that they contain one another, that they, in a way, arise from each other [...]. *Communio* indicates the much more personal and interpersonal dimension of all social systems.” (Wojtyła 1974, 351–352) The communion of persons, therefore, means definitely more than just a human bond, much more than any human community. In further deliberations, Wojtyła states that

“the expression ‘community,’ which is used, for example, in conciliar documents for the purpose of Latin meaning of *communio*, does not mean exactly the same. The expression ‘community’ has the same meaning as the adjective *communis*. However, in the concept of *communio* it is not only about affirming the common, about emphasizing the community as a certain effect or even an expression of the being and action of persons - it is about the very way of being and actions of these people. Namely, it is a way (*modus*) that by being and acting in relation to each other (and thus not only by being and acting ‘together’), through this activity and existence of each other as persons they confirm and affirm.” (Wojtyła 1974, 353)

In such the context, it can be said that in matrimonial relations the concept of “community” is the starting point, while “communion” is the end point (Tykarski 2015, 27). With regard to marriage, the concept of *communio* means not only a way of being, but also a way of acting as an exclusive characteristic of persons, the essence is the gift of self (Wojtyła 1974, 347–361; John Paul II 1986, 38–39).

The term “communion of love,” mentioned for the first time in “Familiaris Consortio,” refers to the creation and vocation of a man, and love is the foundation of both of these realities. “God created a man in his own image and likeness; by calling him into existence out of love, he also called him to love.” (FC 11; CCC 1604)

¹ For more on *communio amoris* see Bukalski and Falewicz 2022.

In the next sentence, the formulation analyzed is quoted in the description of the relationship between the Persons of God and the Trinitarian relationships. "God is love and in himself he lives the mystery of a personal communion of love (*amoris communio*)."

(FC 11) Later in the exhortation, John Paul II clarifies the meaning of love in marital and family life. It appears unequivocally as a calling and a task. "By creating a man in his image and constantly keeping him in existence, God inscribes into the humanity of a man and a woman a vocation, that is, the ability and responsibility for love and community (*officium amoris atque communionis*)."

(FC 11) This fragment of the exhortation is complemented by a statement that "Love is, therefore, the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being" (FC 11). Since love is the "basic and innate vocation," it is legitimate to say that it is this call that leads spouses to holiness (Bukalski in Falewicz 2022, 163).

In the following sentences of the exhortation, John Paul II indicates the sacrament of marriage and the role of the Holy Spirit towards spouses who vow to love each other. "The Holy Spirit, communicated during the sacramental celebration, grants Christian spouses the gift of a new communion, a communion of love (*nova communio amoris*), which is a living and real image of that most special unity which makes the Church the undivided Mystical Body of Christ the Lord." (FC 19) Pointing to the Holy Spirit is crucial here. Love in God are not emotions, feelings, compassion, understanding, cooperation, and even the most wonderful deeds, but it is one of the Persons of God, i.e., the Holy Spirit. "Therefore, the love that is from God and is God, strictly speaking, is the Holy Spirit. Through him the love of God is poured into our hearts, through which the whole Holy Trinity is given to us." (Augustine 1996, 502) Following Augustine, it should be recognized that since the third Person of the Holy Trinity is the Love of the first two Persons, this is the source of the *communio amoris* that Christian spouses are endowed in their sacramental vows (Bukalski, Falewicz 2022, 164). "The love that is the Holy Spirit is the Love that is God, comes from God and expresses the mutual communion of the Father and the Son /.../. The Holy Spirit is some ineffable communion (*communio*) of the Father and the Son." (Jaškiewicz 2018, 39; 41)

Once again using the phrase "communion of love," John Paul II applies it to the family and indicates the social nature of this relationship. "The family is the first and fundamental school of socialization: in it, as in a community of love (*amoris communitas*), making a gift of oneself is a law that gives direction and conditions for growth. The gift of self, which animates the mutual love of the spouses, becomes the model and principle of self-giving." (FC 37) The "community of love" refers to the spouses' external activity. Their communion of love creates proper family relationships. Christians who are sacramentally married constitute a community of faith based on a lasting and strong foundation (Turnšek 2008, 345). Indeed, the family "perceives the dignity of God's person and child /.../. This should be done primarily inside and for the good of marriage and the family, through the daily effort of creating an authentic community of people (*personarum communitas*), which is based and nourished by an internal communion of love (*interna amoris communio*)."

(FC 64) This is a special statement because of the use of the term

“communion of love” as a reality separate from the “community of persons” and the definition of the relationship of these concepts. The Pope’s teaching is unequivocal. The possibility of perceiving the image of God in each person is most effective among spouses and among the Christian family who practice mutual love and create internal relationships of love.

In theology, the idea of *communio amoris* involves first and foremost a reference to Trinitarian relations. The source of this love, however, should be seen in the One God in the Holy Trinity. The term *communio amoris* can only be understood in the personalistic vision of the relationship between a man and a woman as a deep, internal, friendly, intimate community of conjugal life and love (*communitas vitae et amoris coniugal*) (GS 48). The phrase “communion of love” contained in the “Familiaris Consortio” requires the reference to another, fundamental term relating to the marital covenant, namely *communio personarum* (Bukalski, Falewicz 2022, 165). It originally referred to the description of the relationship between the persons of God. In “Familiaris Consortio” the Pope refers to a unique union in which the spouses give themselves in an unselfish gift of themselves: they offer and receive each other. In this specific gift of self, the spouses at the same time show the richness of their humanity as man and woman. In the lives of Christian spouses, the communion of love points above all to an interior relationship with one’s spouse.

Gisbert Greshake, in his conception, points to *Communio* as a paradigm for understanding the Trinitarian God (Greshake 1997). Czesław Bartnik, commenting on this concept, states that Greshake’s trinitology is “the newest, original, and very creative Trinitarian theology /.../. However, it has - in my opinion - some ambiguities. First, *Communio amoris* does not seem to be an ontological unity, but rather a psychological one. Love as such is not a being in itself, but is an amalgamation of various beings, persons.” (Bartnik 2011, 9–10) It seems that in this understanding of the relationship of Persons in the Holy Trinity, it is justified to use the phrase *communio amoris* also to describe marital relations. “The Divine *Communio*, who is the supreme form of *Communio*, and at the same time is the model for human *communio*.” (Wojtkiewicz 2004, 284–285) Communion of love - *communio amoris* realized on the basis of marital love leads to the formation of a personal community and personal communion. But at the same time, in such personal communion, human persons - Christian spouses - are able to fully realize conjugal love.

The conjugal communion of love appears as a certain analogy, a model, as a reflection of the archetype of the communion of love within the Trinity. What is the essential attribute of God - that is love - is realized in marriage as a specific reflection of God’s love. John Paul II, teaching about marriage and the family, and especially the Trinitarian approach to the reality of marriage, clearly indicates that the model of this community should be sought in God himself. “In the light of the New Testament, it is clear that the reference for this community, *its prototype*, should be sought in God Himself. It is contained in the Trinitarian mystery of his Life. The divine ‘We’ is the eternal model for the human ‘we’ - that above all, who

are to be man and woman, created in the image and likeness of God Himself.” (Grs 6; Królikowski 2020, 35–48) The spousal character of marriage is constituted by the gift only between a man and a woman. The “hermeneutic of the gift” of self in marriage is an essential element of conjugal love (John Paul II 1986, 61). In this relationship, mutual self-giving takes place - also in the dimension of sexuality. “The sexuality by which a man and a woman indulge in each other in proper and exclusive marital acts is by no means a purely biological phenomenon but concerns the very inner essence of the human person as such.” (FC 11; CCC 2360) In a marriage covenant, mutual giving is personal and communal. The mutual gift of self between husband and wife is a sign of the communion of persons. The relationship of love indicates a new quality of marriage, a specific “ennoblement” of marital relations.

Communio amoris is a gift from God through which the spouses “become one flesh.” This is done through a free and rational choice. John Paul teaches that marital union “cannot be fully understood and explained except in terms of ‘a person’ and ‘a gift.’ Every man and woman is not fully realized except through a disinterested gift of self.” (Grs 12) Marriage - the whole life covenant they create is directed to the good of the spouses and to the birth and upbringing of children. Through Christ it was raised to the dignity of a sacrament (CCL 1055; CCC 1617). Love as “fundamental and innate vocation” requires from the spouses an answer given in everyday life. The own activity of the spouses in the realization of the vocation is rather an imperative to grow in holiness, and not determinism in the psychological understanding of this term as a cause and an effect (D’Souza, Gurin 2016, 210–214; Kanter 2014)². *Communio amoris* is most effectively revealed in the lives of spouses through conjugal love.

Summing up, it should be unequivocally stated that the marital *communio amoris* has its source in the relationship of the Persons of God, i.e., in the Trinitarian relationships. Here is the model of conjugal love. A special role should be seen in the person of the Holy Spirit who is Love. It should also be borne in mind that the models of communal life in God related to conjugal communion can only be considered as a certain analogy. Strengthened by the gift of the communion of love, spouses realize the communion of persons in marriage and in the family. The gift of self is what animates conjugal love. Mutual self-giving is a sign of the communion of persons. And only this reality allows the family to be transformed into a community of love and a community of persons. That is the external reality of marriage, and the family follows from the internal principle of functioning (*communio amoris*) of sacramental marriage. Sometimes *communio amoris* (communion of love) is used interchangeably as conjugal love, although there are clear distinctions between both expressions (Bukalski and Falewicz 2022, 160–165). The communion of love is the exclusive property of the persons - in this case, the spouses. As a sin-

² The understanding of marital love as a principle of striving for holiness is not in line with contemporary psychological concepts of love. Humanistic psychology understands love as a relation in a relationship, as a decision resulting from a pyramid of needs aimed at satisfying them and achieving goals. The behaviorist approach, on the other hand, reduces the love sensations to the category of reinforcement.

cere gift of self, it is the principle of the communion of persons. It is even inscribed in the humanity of the spouses and is “the basic and innate vocation.” This vocation is not, of course, conjugal love in itself, but by realizing marital love, spouses strive for holiness and have real opportunities to achieve it. Conjugal love is a special and most important place for realizing the communion of love.

3. Conjugal Love in Theological Terms

The teaching of the Church on marriage and conjugal love has changed over the centuries. Since the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), conjugal love has been strongly emphasized as the foundation of the communion of persons and a factor in the realization of marital and family happiness. The Church’s conciliar teaching emphasizes the clearly personalistic aspect of marriage where conjugal love appears as an aid in achieving the marriage goals. This understanding of the sacrament of marriage, however, requires the realization of love between spouses. The Church’s teaching on conjugal love resonates unequivocally in the constitution “*Gaudium et spes*,” the encyclical “*Humanae vitae*” and the apostolic exhortation “*Familiaris consortio*” and “*Amoris laetitia*.”

The “Catechism of the Catholic Church” reads conjugal love in the light of universal love. “God, who created a man out of love, also called him to love, which is the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being /.../. Since God created a man and a woman, their mutual love becomes an image of the absolute and indestructible love with which God loves man.” (CCC 1604) The marital relationship is built on love, which

“embraces the whole, which includes all the elements of a person - the impulses of the body and instinct, the strength of feelings and attachment, the pursuit of spirit and will. Love tends towards a deeply personal unity /.../. It requires indissolubility and fidelity in mutual gifting and opens up to fertility. In a word, it is about the normal characteristics of every natural conjugal love, but in a new sense because the sacrament not only purifies and strengthens them, but elevates them so that they become an expression of truly Christian values.” (CCC 1643)

The sexuality of the spouses is an integral element of conjugal love. “In marital relations, sexuality rises to such a high rank that it is customary to talk about it that it becomes an area of expressing love, or even a language of love. The sexual act, not always equated with procreation, is a special manifestation of love in married life.” (Bohdanowicz 2010, 16) To detach this sphere from conjugal love would mean a reversal of the meaning given to it by God. “Conjugal love, which God blesses, is intended to be fruitful and to be fulfilled in the common work of preserving creation: ‘God blessed them, saying to them: Be fruitful and procreate, so that you may populate the earth and make it subjection to yourselves.’ (Gen 1:28)” (CCC 1604) Sexuality in marital relationships is shown as a relationship of

mutual gifting, self-enrichment, and unification. “The acts by which the spouses are deeply and purely united with each other are noble and dignified, and performed in a human way, signify and support mutual bestowal by which they enrich each other with a spirit of joy and gratitude.” (GS 49)

In a theological sense, conjugal love is included in God’s love, is a reflection of Christ’s love for the Church. It is the love that exists between persons: a man and a woman, completely different and sexually complementary persons. Christian spouses, in Christ’s love for the Church, should always find the model and norm of their own relationships. Although marital love covers the whole person - the sphere of the body and spirit, it must be clearly distinguished from passion, which, unlike conjugal love, does not require the good of the other person or becoming “one flesh” (Gen 2:24). Theological reflection points to a reference to God as the source of all love, the relationship of the spouses to themselves and the bond between the spouses (HV 8). An essential part of the catechism’s teaching is the indication that it embraces the whole of the human person: “marital love contains a wholeness in which all elements of the person enter - the pulses of the body and instinct, the strength of feelings and attachment, the pursuit of the spirit and will.” (CCC 1643; FC 13)

An unequivocal concept of conjugal love was presented by Paul VI in the encyclical “*Humanae vitae*.” The Pope sees the model and source of conjugal love in God who is Love. “Conjugal love best reveals its true nature and dignity to us only when we consider that it draws its beginning - as if from the highest source - from God who is Love and Father.” (HV 8; Królikowski 2020, 93–96) Teaching about love in the context of marriage, the Pope clearly indicates the characteristic features of this love. It is, therefore, a thoroughly human love, and therefore at the same time sensual and spiritual; full; faithful and exclusive until the end of life; and fertile (HV 9). The same attributes of conjugal love are indicated in the “*Familiaris Consortio*” exhortation. The distinguished four essential characteristics of love reveal the fully personal character of conjugal love. The lack of any of these features negates its personalistic character (Wojtyła 1986; Królikowski 2020, 49–64). The first three qualities of conjugal love (human, full, faithful, and exclusive) constitute a foundation for the creation of a *communio personarum* and the realization of the fourth quality, that is, fruitful love (GS 50). Conjugal devotion should remain open “to the transmission of human life” (HV 11). The characteristics of conjugal love distinguished by Paul VI correspond very closely with the psychological aspect of love between spouses. This reality was pointed out directly in the Pope’s address to the auditors of the Roman Rota on February 9, 1976: “Conjugal love, although not taken into account in the sphere of law, has an extremely important and indispensable task regardless of this *munus* in marriage. It is some force of the psychological order that God has provided for the very purposes of marriage.” (Paul VI 1976, 205) The Pope, noticing the purely psychological and therefore natural order of conjugal love, thus opens the possibility or even the necessity of an inter-disciplinary understanding of love. Only such an approach makes it possible to define the mature structure of love. The

classic and still explored theory of Robert Sternberg seems to be helpful. The author notes that in the love of two people three dimensions are important - intimacy (as psychological closeness - sharing life, a sense of bond); passion (understood in terms of striving for physical closeness) and decision/commitment (including the will to recognize and maintain a loving relationship with another person). The types of love that people can have can be described by the presence and proportion of these three aspects. However, only the presence of all these elements allows for the recognition of a given relationship as full and mature love (*consummate love*) (Sternberg and Sternberg 2019). In the speech mentioned above, Paul VI indicated that conjugal love was very desirable and helpful in fulfilling marriage tasks and was a guarantee of achieving the goals of marriage. "Thus, because from your various arrangements there emerge favorable conclusions that have been adopted in the legal, biological and social disciplines - thanks to which marriage has been better understood and recognized in its true nature as a community of love (*communitas amoris*)." (Paul VI 1976, 207)

John Paul II taught that conjugal love was the principle and power of conjugal communion. "The love between a man and a woman in marriage /.../ is animated and sustained by an internal, ceaseless dynamism that leads the family to an ever deeper and stronger communion, which is the foundation and principle of the conjugal and family community." (FC 18) "Familiaris Consortio" recognizes conjugal love as a communion of persons between spouses. It has the character of indivisible unity and indissolubility (FC 19; 20), it is the foundation and principle of the functioning and development of the family understood as a communion of persons. Love shapes and strengthens this communion, "just as without love the family is not a community of persons, just as without love it cannot live, grow and perfect itself as a community of persons" (FC 18; 21).

Pope Benedict XVI, while continuing the teaching of John Paul II on the issue of marital love, indicates that it plays a superior and central role in the Christian life. The Pope recalls the words of St. John: "God is love: whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (1 Jn 4:16), and indicates that these words "express with particular clarity the essence of the Christian faith; the Christian image of God and the resulting image of man and his path" (DCE 1). Benedict XVI makes it very clear that the union of a man and a woman based on "exclusive and definitive love" sanctioned in the sacrament of marriage is "an image of God's relationship with his people, and vice versa: the way in which God loves becomes the measure of human love" (DCE 11). Spouses, desiring each other and each other's well-being, give love to each other. "By mutual commitment to love free from selfishness, the spouses do not guarantee themselves anything - they guarantee themselves to each other." (Królikowski 2020, 95) Benedict XVI's teaching on conjugal love always links this reality with God's love for his people. Through love, spouses abide in Christ, just as Christ abides in the Father through love. In this context, conjugal holiness represents a special likeness to Christ. This likeness is realized through love (Tykarski 2020, 70).

Marital love is presented in the teaching of Pope Francis in the exhortation "Amoris Laetitia." This fundamental marital relationship is presented in the con-

text of St. Paul's hymn to love. The various characteristics of love indicated in the hymn, Francis relates to the marital relationship showing their validity and relevance. Love given to man by the Holy Spirit, who is Love, becomes an important task and at the same time is inscribed in the personal relationship of man and woman. The Exhortation is one of the documents of the regular teaching of the Church and means a new look at marriage and family. It is about looking at each person "with the eyes of God and recognizing Christ in them" (Slatinek 2017, 142).

The Pope also makes a very strong reference to the psychological aspects of marital love. He points out that "desires, feelings, emotions, what the ancients called 'the passions,' all have an important place in married life /.../. They ground the most elementary psychological activity. Human beings live on this earth, and all that they do and seek is fraught with passion." (AL 143) It should also be noted that in reflecting on the emotional and affective life of conjugal love, the Pope very explicitly referred to the authority of St. Thomas Aquinas. In Francis' teaching, there is a particularly strong emphasis on the communal and community-building aspect of love. The spouses, through the sacrament, experience the gift of realizing marital love not only through Christ and with Christ, but above all in Christ. The teaching on the presence of the whole Trinity in marital love is consistent with the teaching of Pope Francis' predecessors: "the Trinity is present in the temple of marital communion /.../, so he dwells deep within the marital love that gives him glory." (AL 314) This essential statement points to both the source of marital communion and the source of love. The gift of mutual love in marriage and in the family should be modelled on Trinitarian relationships. In addition to this supernatural aspect of marital love, the exhortation strongly emphasizes its typically human character. It is presented in a psychological context. "Loving ourselves is only important as a psychological prerequisite for being able to love others." (AL 101)

Both the conciliar vision of conjugal love and the post-conciliar papal teaching show the uniquely personal character of this relationship between man and woman. It is an essential element in the integration of the life of the spouses.

4. Marital Holiness

The phrase *communio sanctorum* was known in theological thought already in antiquity. It was used by the Fathers of the Church. Although it does not appear directly in "Familiaris Consortio," the call to holiness of spouses is clearly indicated in the exhortation. "In God's plan, all husbands and wives are called in marriage to holiness, and this lofty vocation is fulfilled to the extent that the human person is able to respond to God's command with serene confidence in God's grace and in his or her own will." (FC 34) *Communio sanctorum* is understood in two ways. It can refer to the community of saints, that is, those who have faith in God, "communion among holy persons" (*sancti*), or it can refer to the community that possesses holy things and gathers for those things as well (*sancta*). These are the

sacraments, faith, works of charity, the communion of love, and above all God himself (CCC 948). Both understandings can be applied to Christian spouses. This position of the Church is confirmed by the teaching in the Catechism: “*Sancta sanctis!* – ‘What is holy to those who are holy’ is the acclamation pronounced by the celebrant in most Eastern liturgies during the elevation of the Holy Gifts before Communion is given. The faithful (*sancti*) are fed with the Body and Blood of Christ (*sancta*).” (CCC 948) In teaching about holiness, the Exhortation points to the universal nature of this vocation. It should be linked to the image of man as a person, to human dignity and to participation in the love and holiness of God. “Christian spouses and parents are included in the universal call to sanctity. For them, this call is specified by the sacrament they have celebrated and is carried out concretely in the realities proper to their conjugal and family life.” (FC 56; CCC 2013; LG 40) The vocation of spouses to holiness is a vocation to create a *communio sanctorum*. This is done through “the concrete language of the reality of married and family life.” Christian spouses are also called to give witness to a holy life (FC 66). The spouses, through the sacrament, experience the gift of realizing conjugal love not only through Christ and with Christ, but above all in Christ. This is the way to the holiness of married life to *communio sanctorum*. Dietrich von Hildebrand, referring to St. Augustine, states that “holy love in Christ in a certain way anticipates our life in eternity, and thus the love with which the *communio sanctorum* is filled” (Hildebrand 2021, 463; Augustine 1977, 653). One could say that this one sentence shows the order from *communio amoris* to *communio sanctorum* and this communion in eternity.

Marital holiness has its obvious source in God Himself, who is Holy. The Bible repeatedly invokes the holiness of God who sanctifies His creation. “Since I am the Lord your God, sanctify yourselves! Be holy because I am holy!” (Leviticus 11:44) Peter the Apostle refers to this invocation: “In all your conduct, you also become saints, like the Holy One who called you, because it is written: ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’” (1 Pet 1:15-16) The sanctity and dignity of the mystery of marriage finds its justification in biblical doctrine, in the specific words of Christ and the Apostles.

The sanctity of marriage systematically appears in the teaching of the Church. In turn, the Second Vatican Council teaches: “spouses are gifted by grace to lead a holy life.” (GS 49; CCC 1617) The doctrine of the Council, invoking biblical teaching, shows marriage as a union of a man and a woman with the hallmark of holiness. This mark results from the inclusion of marriage in the order of creation and salvation. This conciliar aspect of marriage was also very clearly indicated by John Paul II in “*Familiaris Consortio*.” “The proper source and primary means of sanctifying marriage and the family is the sacrament of matrimony /.../. Penetrated by the spirit of Christ, who imbues their whole lives with faith, hope and love, the spouses come closer and closer to achieving their own perfection and mutual sanctification.” (FC 56) In the teaching of John Paul II, marriage is presented from a personalistic perspective, and this approach is closely related to love. When love is realized in the sacrament of marriage, it can be regarded as an exemplary way

of striving for holiness. The essence of marital holiness is most clearly revealed in offering oneself to one's spouse, caring for his or her welfare and the welfare of other family members (Tykarski 2020, 71). This is also the overtone of "Familiaris Consortio."

Pope Francis, likewise, recalls the Church's teaching on the universal call to holiness. He also addresses the spouses in a unique way: "we are all called to be saints, living with love, and bearing witness in our daily activities, where everyone is /.../. Are you married? Be holy by loving and caring for your husband or wife as Christ did for the Church." (Francis 2018, 14) Desiring holiness, making it the goal of one's life, and making efforts to pursue holiness do not eliminate the fact that "holiness is first and foremost a gift from God. It is God who sanctifies his creation, and it only responds to this gift." (Nawracała 2019, 101) Christian marriage is not only a relationship between husband and wife, but it is above all a mystery relationship between people and God. In his reflection, Adam Skreczko points to a threefold way of understanding and explaining the sanctity of sacramental marriage. First, holiness is seen from the perspective of faith. Marriage is "a profound community of conjugal life and love established by God and regulated by His laws" (CCC 1603). The second source of the sanctity of marriage is participation in the aforementioned laws of God. The belonging of persons to each other in marriage is an image of the mutual belonging of God and a man. The sanctity of marriage is related to the sanctity of the person. This order shows that when instituting marriage, God allows spouses to share in his sovereignty over them. And thirdly, the sanctity of marriage results from the tasks undertaken by the spouses: creating a community of life and love; the transmission of life; educating a child about faith and eternal life (Skreczko 2016, 196–198; GS 48).

In the history of the Church, marital holiness was seen as a kind of escape from everyday life. This model assumed that despite everyday life - inherently bad and sinful - the spouses could achieve sanctity when they even ran away from this everyday reality. The second approach even tried to sanctify everyday life. The transition from *profanum* to *sacrum* was a condition for a change. In this perspective, daily life does not have to be bad, but it does not guarantee sanctity. Holiness would, therefore, be possible in everyday life. Finally, the third approach pointed to the full acceptance of the everyday life of married life as a condition for growing in holiness. The sanctification of the spouses is thus carried out through everyday life. The emphasis is placed on the actions of the believer who was called by God himself to holiness (Skreczko 2016, 198–199). An example of such holiness is, for example, two married couples who fully realized the gift of *communio amoris*.

Luigi and Maria Beltrame Quattrocchi are the first beatified married couple in the history of the Church, whose holiness was not based on heroic deeds, but on the depth of living out their daily duties. Luigi and Maria "were raised to the glory of the altars because of the shining example of their conjugal love, for their mutual gift in the marriage covenant, for their amazing ability to love each other and raise children. These virtues are so beautiful in the eyes of the Church that they have been shown as examples of Christian perfection." (Moia 2002, 67) The

sanctity of the married life of Luigi and Maria is a consequence of deliberately striving for such a state. Conjugal love was obvious and natural. Such a relationship was easily perceived by the children. Enrichetta's daughter testifies to her parents' love: "Daddy's love for our mother was so deep that it surpassed the different mentality or temperament of her parents." (Moia 2002, 79) The son of Luigi and Maria, Fr Paolino, recalling the full of love marital relations of his parents, at the same time points to the source of their parents' marital love: "the Christian virtues which they fully achieved were rooted in the supernatural nature of the marriage community, in the sacramental charism that they lived as husband and a wife in a symbiosis of grace." (144)

The second couple is Louis and Zelig Martin - the first canonized marriage in church history. Fulfilling their call to holiness in marriage meant for them total submission to God's will and the realization of love. Louis and Zelig's religious life was among the highest in the hierarchy of values. "The sanctity of the Martin state in their attitude towards the Eucharist was manifested not in the apparent zeal but in the fact that they were able to recognize the important role of this sacrament." (Mongin 2009, 52) The Martins "continued to thank God for the love that united them, for the strong faith that guided them, for the children he entrusted to them, for the work they had and which allowed them to think without anxiety about the future of their daughters" (Clapier 2020, 13).

What closely connected both married couples with Jesus Christ in everyday life was mutual love. Everyday life, also in the dimension of corporeality, was almost full of holiness. The spouses were also fully aware that this way of life led them, and the children given to them to holiness. Living by God's grace on a daily basis, the gift of self was also a sign of holy conjugal love. The sanctity of marriage tasks, the realization of conjugal love (*communio amoris*), was clearly revealed in the lives of people elevated to the altars. Conscious striving for holiness was realized from the beginning of the marriage vow. They both understood perfectly well that holiness consisted in carrying out our daily duties with integrity. The sanctity of life became a clear goal of life and was associated with the realization of love.

5. Conclusions

The universal call to holiness is connected with the fact of belonging to the Church, which is holy. From ontological holiness pertaining to God and His Church arises the vocation of sacramental spouses to moral holiness. "Everyone in the Church, precisely because they are members, receive and thereby share in the common vocation to holiness. In the fullness of this title and on equal par with all other members of the Church, the lay faithful are called to holiness." (ChL 16) The perspective of the universal call to holiness requires asking the question about the place of love between spouses in this vocation. The sacramental marriage union is a unique community of a man and a woman - *communio personarum*. For such communion to exist, the love of husband and wife is necessary, i.e., the principle

of this communion. On the other hand, only people - in this case husband and wife - have the ability to create a community of people in marriage and in the family. *Communio amoris* as a gift that spouses receive and as an interior principle of married life enables them to grow in holiness. It is the foundation of Christian marriage. The conscious path from *communio amoris* and in *communio personarum* is the path to *communio sanctorum*, that is, to the communion of saints through daily married life filled with the realization of love between husband and wife. John Paul II presents this context in "Familiaris Consortio." Examples of such a path are found in the lives of the first spouses who were raised to the altars as blessed and saints. Their beatifications and canonizations were related only to the normal, everyday fulfilment of the sacramental marriage vow. Leading spouses to sanctity in life is one of the most important tasks of the pastoral care of families. However, in order to carry out this task effectively, it is necessary to show the supernatural character of marriage. "The value of marriage, this indissoluble union of love between two people, cannot be called into question. Whatever difficulties may arise, we must not give up defending that original love which united two people and which God continues to bless. Marriage is a way of holiness, even when it becomes a way of the cross." (John Paul II 1999, 5)

Abbreviations

- AL – Francis 2016 [Amoris laetitia].
- CCC – Catechism of the Catholic Church 1995.
- CCL – Code of Canon Law 1983.
- CHL – John Paul II 1988 [Christifideles laici].
- DCE – Benedict XVI 2005 [Deus caritas est].
- FC – John Paul II 1981 [Familiaris consortio].
- GE – Francis 2018 [Gaudete et exsultate].
- Grs – John Paul II 1994 [Gratissimam sane].
- GS – Second Vatican Council 1965 [Gaudium et spes].
- HV – Paul VI 1968 [Humanae vitae].
- LG – Second Vatican Council 1964 [Lumen gentium].
- SC – Second Vatican Council 1963 [Sacrosanctum concilium].

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