



OPENING OF THE SYNODAL PROCESS

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On October 9th and 10th, the Synod of Bishops "For a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission" was inaugurated with two very significant and intense moments, both of which saw the participation of the Holy Father Pope Francis.

On Saturday 9th, the synodal assembly was convened together with a representation of ecclesial realities, including a large group of young people established at the Dicastery for the Laity, the Family and Life, to experience a moment of reflection and listening on the basis of a trace prepared by the synod secretariat. It refers to two valuable documents that will accompany from the methodological point of view the path of the synod: the Vademecum and the preparatory document available on the website <https://www.synod.va/it.html>. The reflection was preceded by a moment of prayer and listening to the Word, precisely to recall that the synod is first and foremost an ecclesial convocation to live intensely listening to the Spirit. All the moments, not only those specifically dedicated to prayer, were crossed by an intense and deep spiritual rhythm, with adequate spaces of silence that served to interiorize the testimony and the reports, to nourish the comparison in the light of a sincere mutual listening and to organize the thought before the interventions.

From listening comes the desire to walk together, not alone, but along the paths that weave through the ordinary lives of people, full of questions and challenges that question the life of the community, particularly in this delicate and critical phase of overcoming the pandemic phase on a global level, but still full of tensions and contrasts that risk to increase the forms and expressions of inequality in the world. The synodal church also wants to respond to a desire for sharing, fraternity and unity that comes from so many people and that concretely tests a style of participation and inclusion in different situations and local contexts.

In this sense, some testimonies and experiences from the five continents were presented that showed how stories of synodality have been experimented locally.

Many small colored pieces that form a puzzle, as Card. Jean-Claude Hollerich, General Rapporteur of the Synod, recalled in his speech: "an enormous puzzle where everyone can participate, especially the poorest, the voiceless, those on the periphery. If we exclude some players, the puzzle will not be complete." Listening to everyone, then, and perhaps even more so, converting the entire pastoral ministry to listening, so that it may make room for everyone, especially those who are searching and those who ask questions, even uncomfortable ones, to the community. A dynamic listening, carried out on the road during the journey, capable of expressing itself with gestures of proximity like those of the Samaritan.

"We have the opportunity to become a Church of proximity," recalled Pope Francis in his speech, recalling the need to show ourselves more and more as a church of proximity, compassion and tenderness, according to the "style of God."

Listening also for the bishops, who listen to the Gospel, proclaimed by the deacon, they do not proclaim it themselves. Card. Jean-Claude Hollerich stressed "We are not the masters of the Gospel, we are its servants. Our listening must always include our conversion to the Gospel."

Another key word that ran through the proceedings, particularly those of the panels, was spiritual, pastoral and ecological conversion... a profound change that matures in the desire to adhere to the Gospel in this time in order to resist the three temptations that the Pope wanted to warn the assembly against: formalism, intellectualism and immobility. These are three risks the Pope had already spoken about on April 30th during the audience with the national council of CA when he said that the contribution of the laity is precisely that of helping the synodal path to be concrete and not abstract and inclusive and not self-referential. The challenge that the Pope took up and relaunched is that of walking "not occasionally but structurally towards a synodal Church".

Theme that he also resumed in a decisive manner during his homily on October 10th during the Eucharistic celebration at the beginning of the Synod: encounter, listening and discernment must be three essential elements of the synodal path. Starting from the biblical passage of the "rich young man" described by Mark, the Holy Father highlighted how the synod should be neither an ecclesial convention nor a study conference or a political congress where majorities and minorities challenge each other but rather a "healing process led by the Spirit" that leads to a true discernment on the choices to be made, all together: "in these days Jesus calls us, as he did with the rich man in the Gospel, to empty ourselves, to get rid of what is worldly, and also of our closures and our repetitive pastoral models; to ask ourselves what God wants to tell us in this time and towards which direction he wants to lead us". Two intense days lived in listening, recognizing the beauty of so much diversity already present in the life of the church and experiencing a sincere longing that the perimeter of listening may flood and include, include to allow participation, participate all to feel the beauty of being together, "a people on the road" as we sang during communion accompanied by the choir of Rome directed by Marco Frisina. A richness that we want to keep together and integrate also in the working method of the synod and in the way to reach the final decisions, as Cardinal Mario Grech reminded us immediately provoking the assembly with a challenging question: "What if, instead of ending the assembly by delivering the final document to the Holy Father, we took another step, that of returning the conclusions of the synodal assembly to the particular Churches the whole synodal process began from?" There emerges a lively desire to envision an authentically ecclesial method, spiritually grounded in scripture and the living tradition of the church, as we read of the preparatory document that encourages all pastors to take care to reach out to everyone "so that in the orderly unfolding of the synodal journey what the apostle Paul recommends to the communities may be realized: 'Do not stifle the Spirit, or despise prophecies. Test everything and hold on to what is good' (1 Thess 5:19-21)".

This tension towards unity also emerged from the lively desire to live the synodal journey in the ecumenical perspective and interreligious dialogue as well as the grace of this ecclesial moment that - as recalled several times by Card. Hollerich - will have to "lead us from the I to the We" can also become richness for a world in search of the communitarian reasons that can regenerate civil living and lay the foundations for a new institutional phase that is capable of glimpsing a new social, economic and political paradigm.

"A synodal Church is a prophetic sign especially for a community of nations incapable to propose a shared project, through which to pursue the good of all: practicing synodality is today for the Church the most evident way to be "universal sacrament of salvation" (LG, n. 48), "sign and instrument of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race" (LG, n. 1) ".

The invitation to walk together, to "hold together" the complexity and variety of differences, to "feel together" starting from a conversion of heart and outlook towards this time: these are the coordinates that make us understand how this time that is beginning is truly to be welcomed as an extraordinary gift and a possibility to be lived with courage and without fear.