

Ecumenical Vigil of Prayer

# Together

Gathering of the People of God

to entrust to the Holy Spirit the works of the first session  
of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops  
(October 2023)



For a synodal Church  
communion | participation | mission

# Introduction

This evening in St. Peter's Square, brothers and sisters in Christ have gathered together from all walks of life and from around the world. We are members of the Synod, youth participating in the “Together” gathering, leaders and delegates from different Churches and Christian communions.... Pilgrims of faith, we are delighted to journey and pray together. We are also in communion with many Christians praying with us in their local communities. As we renew our desire and commitment to journey together towards unity, our hearts are filled with gratitude for the gifts God has given us along the synodal path we have walked since October 2021. In a special way we want to entrust to the Holy Spirit the Assembly members who will be gathered in prayer for three days in preparation for the official opening of the XVI Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on 4 October.

App to listen to the audio broadcast of the evening prayer:



# Pre-Vigil

## 1/ Gratitude for the gift of unity and the synodal journey

Three young people from different ecclesial contexts and continents will speak about their experience of the synodal journey.

### Emile from Lebanon

We come from our local Churches to give thanks for the call to resolutely undertake the path of synodal conversion, a call that God is addressing to the Church of the 3rd millennium, enabling us to continue moving towards deeper unity there is no synodality without ecumenism and no ecumenism without synodality. Both “are rooted in the baptismal dignity of the entire People of God. Together they invite renewed commitment to the vision of a missionary synodal Church. [...] They are spiritual processes of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation in a dialogue of conversion that can lead to a healing of memory.” (*Instrumentum Laboris* B1f)

Brief testimony from Emile regarding his experience of the synod’s ecumenical dimension and that responds to the following questions: “How can the experience and fruits of the ecumenical journey help to build a more synodal Catholic Church; how can synodality help the Catholic Church to better respond to Jesus’ prayer: “that they may all be one... that the world may believe” (John 17:21)?”

### Agata from Indonesia

We are here as members of the International Youth Advisory Body created by the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life as a fruit of the Synod on Youth. We committed ourselves to supporting the synodal journey in our local Churches. We give thanks to all those around the world who have participated in the consultation, particularly young people and all who are the driving force for the process. We give thanks for the Christians from other Churches and Christian communities who have embraced this journey with the Catholic

Church. We became witnesses of enlivening creativity though how synod teams listened to and communicated the voices of all, especially the poorest and those on the peripheries.

Brief testimony from Agata's synod experience, illustrating these observations.

“One common trait unites the narratives of the stages of the first phase: it is the surprise expressed by participants who were able to share the synodal journey in a way that exceeded their expectations. For those who take part, the synodal process offers an opportunity for an encounter in faith that makes the bond with the Lord, fraternity between people and love for the Church, not only on an individual level, but involving and energising the entire community. The experience is that of a horizon of hope opening up for the Church, a clear sign of the presence and action of the Spirit that guides it through history on its path towards the Kingdom (cf. *Lumen Gentium* 5): ‘[T]he protagonist of the Synod is the Holy Spirit’”. (*Instrumentum Laboris* 17)

## Tilen from Slovenia

This listening process has given us the opportunity to truly contemplate the Spirit's action present in the diversity of local Churches. We give thanks for the fruits already received and born during the diocesan, national and continental stages. We are more deeply aware of the challenge to walk together in diversity and to being guided by the Spirit. We are committed to growing as a Church of listening, encounter and dialogue, in order to radiate communion and be ever more a sign and instrument of the unity of all humanity.

Brief testimony from Tilen.

“The characteristic of a synodal Church is the ability to manage tensions without being crushed by them, experiencing them as a drive to deepen how communion, mission and participation are lived and understood. Synodality is a privileged path of conversion, because it reconstitutes the Church in unity: it heals her wounds and reconciles her memory, welcomes the differences she bears and redeems her from festering divisions, thus enabling her to embody more fully her vocation to be ‘in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race’ (*Lumen Gentium* 1). Authentic listening and the ability to find ways to continue walking together beyond fragmentation and polarisation are indispensable for the Church to remain alive

and vital and to be a powerful sign for the cultures of our time.” (*Instrumentum Laboris* 28)

But often we are tempted to think that synodality happens in very official settings in large halls. But for me, some of the most transformative synodal conversations have happened almost out of nowhere. When a question from a friend started an all-night series of listening, disagreeing, growing, and seeing how taking the time to listen to each other helped us to go deeper. When I listen to young people, I am amazed at how deep and sincere their faith is. And I can only echo the words of Pope Francis: “The Church needs [young people] [their] momentum, intuitions, and faith.” (*ChV* 299)

We still have a long way to go. When I look at the Church today, I still see it stumbling on the path of truth and life. Too many young people still speak of the ways in which they have experienced hurt and pain in the Church. As members of one body, we weep and cry with those who suffer. But, aware of my own weaknesses and shortcomings, I also ask Jesus to heal me and transform my heart. I pray that, strengthened by the Holy Spirit, I may become more and more a sign of God's incredible love.

Ukrainian song

## 2/ Gratitude for the gift of the other

No one is absolutely whole. One cannot do without the other or others, because being self-sufficient is just an illusion and the relationship is not something extra, but is fundamental to making the seed of beauty that the Lord has planted in each one grow. In the first synodal phase, we experienced that the other, with their diversity, is not a threat or a factor to be kept under control, but a person to whom "a particular manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good". We have understood even more that the other is a brother or sister and together with them, and so many others, we form one human family in which the only rule is to care for one another.

The parable of the Good Samaritan that *Faith and Light* has chosen to represent encapsulates, thanks to the narration that passes through our way of looking, attitudes and gestures, the beauty of the relationship with the other. The decision to propose the passage in different languages is motivated by the desire that EVERYONE, each with his or her own originality, may feed on the bread of the Word.

### The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37)

Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he said, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the law? What do you read there?" He answered, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself." And he said to him, "You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live."

But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while travelling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."



(Illustration by Silvija Knezekytė, a friend of *Faith and Light* and the Provincial Vice-Coordinator for Lithuania)

To access the Gospel in cartoons:



Nigerian song

### 3/ Thanksgiving for the gift of peace

This contribution evokes the gift of peace. Two young people with past experience of forced displacement will talk about their life paths and what peace means to them. They are Daniela from Colombia and Wael from Syria. Both now work at the *Jesuit Refugee Service*, in an international office based in Rome.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God". (Mt 5:9)

#### Testimony of Wael, refugee from Aleppo, Syria

Dear friends,

I want to extend a warm welcome to each one of you. My name is Wael, and I come from Aleppo, a city in Syria that has suffered greatly from war and earthquakes. Italy became my home for the last seven years. I am grateful for my incredible friends in Italy who welcomed me in their home.

In today's world, conflicts and displacement are still unfortunately common. People risk everything, in the first place, their most important treasure: their lives. They face overwhelming struggles being forced to start over from scratch, seeking peace and safety. It's like being a baby learning to walk and speak for the first time.

Despite the obstacles encountered on their personal journeys, refugees still face prejudice and discrimination by some of the host communities who live inside their own privileged bubble, making them believe they are superior.

Too often, we build walls that separate us from each other, marking certain individuals as "us" and others as "them," leading us to the trap of exclusion and a misguided sense of superiority.

I believe that embracing a wider "we" is the key to peace. Let's break down boundaries and celebrate the value of our shared humanity while appreciating our unique backgrounds. No matter where we come from or what we believe in, every person deserves peace and respect. We should reject prejudice, stereotypes and bias. Instead, embrace the beauty and richness of our differences.

Together, let's become artisans of peace and create a world of love and harmony. By having conversations, seeking mutual understanding to



overcome the fear that exclude others, we can build a world where each human being is valued, respected, enjoying their right to full dignity. I invite you to become artisans of peace towards a world where everyone, regardless of their race, nationality, or language, can value the gift of the other and the gift of peace.

Thank you for being here today, united under the power of peace.

## Testimony of Daniela, from Bogotá, Colombia

My name is Daniela and I was born in Colombia, a country that is still struggling for peace after more than 60 years of armed conflict, which has caused us to become one of the countries with the highest numbers of internally displaced people and refugees in the world. At the moment more than 5 million of us live abroad. In all humility I come before you to speak for those who cannot make their voices heard: those who have died because of displacement and those who are still struggling to find a home. I address you, Synod participants and all people of good will, as did St Paul to the Romans, with a call to reflect unity. The apostle speaks to us of one body composed of many members, each with its own function. Truly, each of us has been created with specific gifts, which we are called to use build peace in our world community. During my journey as an immigrant I have witnessed these gifts in people of all religions, ethnicities and backgrounds. As a beneficiary of the accompaniment I received while finding a new home with my family, I want to ask each of you, and especially those of you privileged to participate in this Synod, to reflect personally on what this call means for the Church.

Peace-building, in my experience, is not the expression of agreeing with one another, but of walking together listening, acknowledging and learning what is often unknown to us. For this reason, "the other" is a gift on this path, capable of teaching us new methods for living together. The displaced person is more than their condition, more than their circumstances. Being displaced is not what defines me, but what brings me closer to others. I carry in my heart the gifts of kindness, love and support that I received during times of uncertainty, fear, frustration and exhaustion. As you enter this historic moment, we have the opportunity to foster peace for the well-being of the human family. I invite you to walk together as artisans of this peace,

recognising the other, in all its different forms as a divine instrument that gives to the world, like organs to a body, their unique and important function. We have the capacity to build an enduring peace, not based on false notions of a homogenous racial or national unity, but on the profound recognition of the other as part of the human family and worthy of love.

## Daniela in Italian

- We would like to invite you to pray together now the final prayer of *Fratelli Tutti*, that you can find in the booklet in communion with all victims of war and violence, especially in Ukraine, Syria, Myanmar, Iraq, Ethiopia, Sudan, Yemen, in Colombia, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Haiti, in Kivu, Sahel, Somalia and throughout the world.

"Come, Holy Spirit!  
Show us your beauty  
reflected in all the peoples of the earth  
to discover that everyone is important,  
that all are necessary, that they are different faces  
of same humanity loved by God. Amen."

## Symbolic gesture

Flowers and a life jacket are brought to the Cross

Free to choose to migrate or to stay – the [message of Pope Francis](#) for the World Day of Refugees and Migrants



## The Canticle of the Creatures of St Francis

# 4/ Thanksgiving for the gift of the Creation

## VIA CREATIONIS

Introduction: Every year, our Christian churches celebrate the gift of the Creation during the Season of Creation that takes place right now, from 1 September to 4 October. We pray the Via Creationis, where at each station we read from the two books God has written: that of Scripture and that of creation, as taught by St Augustine and others. Please join us in the responses.

### 1st STATION: THE GIFT OF LIGHT

℣. Praise to you, God the Creator.

℞. We thank you for your magnificent Creation.

In the beginning... God said, "Let there be light!" And the light was. God saw that the light was good (Gen 1:1.3-4).

℣. Thank you, Creator, for the gift of light.

℞. Amen.

### 2nd STATION: THE GIFT OF HEAVEN

℣. Praise to you, Creator God.

℞. We thank you for your magnificent Creation.

God said: "Let there be a firmament...God called the firmament heaven (Gen 1, 6. 8)

℣. Thank you, Creator, for the gift of heaven.

℞. Amen.

### 3rd STATION: THE GIFT OF THE EARTH AND THE SEA

℣. Praise to you, Creator God.

℞. We thank you for your magnificent Creation.

God said: "Let the waters that are under the sky be gathered together in one place and let the dry land appear. While He called the mass of the waters sea. God saw that it was good. God said: "Let the earth produce shoots, grasses that produce seed and fruit trees"...God saw that it was good. (Gen 1, 9-12)

℣. Thank you, Creator, for the gift of the earth and the sea.

℞. Amen.

#### 4th STATION: THE GOODNESS OF THE HEAVENLY BODIES

℣. Praise to you, Creator God.

℞. We thank you for your magnificent Creation.

God said: "Let there be fountains of light in the firmament of the heavens...the two great fountains of light: the greater fountain of light to rule the day and the lesser fountain of light to rule the night, and the stars"...God saw that it was good. (Gen 1:14. 16. 18)

℣. Thank you, Creator, for the gift of the heavenly bodies.

℞. Amen.

#### 5th STATION: THE GIFT OF THE CREATURES OF WATER AND AIR

℣. Praise to you, Creator God.

℞. We thank you for your magnificent Creation.

God said, "Let the waters teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth, before the firmament of heaven"...God saw that it was good. (Gen 1:20-21)

℣. Thank you, Creator, for the gift of the creatures of water and air.

℞. Amen.

#### 6th STATION: THE GIFT OF THE CREATURES OF THE EARTH

℣. Praise to you, Creator God.

℞. We thank you for your magnificent Creation.

God said: 'Let the earth bring forth living creatures after their kind: cattle, reptiles, and wild animals, after their kind'...God saw that it was good...God said: 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. (Gen 1:24-26)

℣. Thank you, Creator, for the gift of the creatures of the earth.

℞. Amen.

#### 7th STATION: THE GIFT OF EVERYTHING

℣. Praise to you, Creator God.

℞. We thank you for your magnificent Creation.

God saw what he had made, and behold, it was a very good thing...God blessed the seventh day and consecrated it, because in it he had ceased from all work that he had done in creating. (Gen 1:31 - 2:3)

℣. Thank you, Creator, for the gift of all the Creation.

℟. Amen.

## Passage

While we thank God for the gift of the Creation, let us also recognise how we have failed to take care of it, causing the ecological crisis in its different dimensions: climate change and its consequences on vulnerable populations, decrease in biodiversity, accumulation of toxic pollution in the air, water in the soil. All this poses a serious threat to generations to come and fuels a global ecological anxiety that affects the youngest and paves the way for more conflicts. Let us pray with this year's theme and symbol for Season of Creation: **May Justice and Peace Flow Like a Mighty River**, to heal injustice and violence against other creatures and the poor.

## Symbolic gesture

A symbolic “river” is laid out from the foot of the Cross by representatives of the Synod, refugees and the vulnerable. It is this year's symbol for the Season of Creation (inspired by Amos 5:24): a river flowing as a sign of our common work for justice and peace with all creatures and, as people, among ourselves.



## A Serbian Orthodox choir sings

# The Prayer Vigil

**Introductory song:** *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus.*

**Pope Francis:**

*+ In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit*

**Bartholomew I, Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople:**

*We stand before You, Holy Spirit,  
as we gather together in Your name.  
With You alone to guide us,  
make Yourself at home in our hearts;  
Teach us the way we must go  
and how we are to pursue it.  
We are weak and sinful;  
do not let us promote disorder.  
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path  
nor partiality influence our actions.  
Let us find in You our unity  
so that we may journey together to eternal life  
and not stray from the way of truth  
and what is right.  
All this we ask of You,  
who are at work in every place and time,  
in the communion of the Father and the Son,  
forever and ever. Amen.*

**First reading: Ephesians 4:1-7 Revd. Dr Anne Burghardt (Lutheran World Federation)**

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Ephesians

I, the prisoner in the Lord, implore you to lead a life worthy of your vocation. Bear with one another charitably, in complete selflessness, gentleness and patience. Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together.

There is one Body, one Spirit, just as you were all called into one and the same hope when you were called. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God who is Father of all, over all, through all and within all. Each one of us, however, has been given his own share of grace, given as Christ allotted it.

**Verses of Psalm 104** with the refrain Alleluia 11 sung by all.

- 1. How varied are your works, Lord! In wisdom you have made them all.*
- 2. These all look to you to give them their food in due season.*
- 3. You send forth your Spirit, O Lord; and so you renew the face of the earth.*
- 4. May the glory of the Lord endure forever; may the Lord be glad in his works!*
- 5. I will sing to the Lord all my life; I will sing praise to my God while I live.*

**Gospel reading: Mar Paulus Benjamin (Oriental Assyrian Church):**

Matthew 5:1-12

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew

Seeing the crowds, Jesus went up the hill. There he sat down and was joined by his disciples. Then he began to speak. This is what he taught them:

‘How happy are the poor in spirit;  
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Happy those who mourn:  
they shall be comforted.

Happy the gentle:  
they shall have the earth for their heritage.

Happy those who hunger and thirst for what is right:  
they shall be satisfied.

Happy the merciful:  
they shall have mercy shown them.

Happy the pure in heart:  
they shall see God.

Happy the peacemakers:  
they shall be called sons of God.

Happy those who are persecuted in the cause of right:  
theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

‘Happy are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven.

*Chinese*

耶穌說：「神貧的人是有福的，因為天國是他們的。」

*Spanish*

Jesús dijo: «Bienaventurados los pobres en el espíritu, porque de ellos es el reino de los cielos».

*Polish*

Jezus mówi: „Błogosławieni ubodzy w duchu, albowiem do nich należy królestwo niebieskie.”

*English*

Jesus said: ‘How happy are the poor in spirit; theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

**Song:** *Dona la pace, Signore*

**Silence** of 8 minutes introduced with the words: “During this time of silence, let us remain before the Lord who is present and unites us”

### **Prayers of Intercession**

Each intercession is introduced by a Church leader and read by a Fraternal Delegate to the Synod

Kyrie 13 is sung between each intercession.



– *Kyrie eleison*

1. **Patriarch Mor Ignatius Aphrem II of Antioch** - Christ Jesus, look upon your family. We entrust all your disciples to you, that they may continually grow as peacemakers.

**Rev. Dr Elijah Brown** (*World Baptist Alliance*) - For all who suffer from violence and war in Ukraine, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Pakistan, Haiti, Nicaragua, Congo, Syria, Sudan, Ethiopia and in many other places around the world. For those who persevere, wherever they live, in the service of justice and reconciliation, we pray to you!

– *Kyrie eleison*

2. **Archbishop Bernd Wallet** (*Union of Utrecht*) - Christ Jesus, look upon your family gathered here. We implore you: keep us close to one another, in a spirit of listening and unity!

**Rev.do Gebrestadik Debeb** (*Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Italy*) - For the leaders of all our Churches and Christian communities, may they be ever more committed to promoting the visible unity of all who follow you. May they build bridges of dialogue and friendship with believers of different religions. We pray to you!

– *Kyrie eleison*

3. **Rev. Dr. Billy Wilson** (*World Pentecostal Fellowship*) - Christ Jesus, look upon your family. We entrust to you all those whose trust has been wounded.

**Archbishop Khajag Barsamian** (*Armenian Apostolic Church*) - For those who doubt, for minorities and those who suffer from being isolated, for the victims of contempt and all forms of segregation, we pray to you!

– *Kyrie eleison*

4. **Patriarch Mor Ignatius Aphrem II of Antioch** - Christ Jesus, look upon your family. We implore you to come to satisfy the longing of those who hunger and thirst for justice.

**Rev. Father Thaoufilos El-Soryan** (*Coptic Orthodox Church*) - For all those who leave their land in the hope of a good and dignified life, for refugees, for immigrants and those who receive them, we pray to you!

– *Kyrie eleison*

5. **Rev. Dr. Thomas Schirmacher** (*World Evangelical Alliance*) - Christ Jesus, look upon your family. We implore you, because you have entrusted the planet to us as a gift.

**Rev. Dr. Marco Fornerone** (*Waldensian Table*) - For the victims of climate change and pollution, for those who work to safeguard biodiversity and the creation, for those who strive to keep the earth habitable for all living things, we pray to you!

– *Kyrie eleison*

6. **Bishop Andrej** (*Serbian Orthodox Church*) - Christ Jesus, look upon your family. We thank you for inviting us to follow you with our lives.

**Rev. Dr. Jong Chun Park** (*World Methodist Council*) - Give us a humble heart that listens to others. We entrust to you the work of the General Assembly of the Synod. For the members of the assembly and for the fraternal delegates of the Christian Churches who participate in it, who are about to leave for a 3-day spiritual retreat, we pray to you!

– *Kyrie eleison*

7. **Rev. Dr. Kuzipa Nalwamba** (*World Council of Churches*) - Christ Jesus, look upon your family. We entrust to you all those you welcome into the Kingdom because they are mistreated and persecuted.

**Metropolitan Mar Barnabas** (*Syrian Orthodox Malankara Church*) - For the victims of violence, harassment and abuse, in the Church and in society, for those who accompany them on a path of healing, justice and freedom, we pray to you!

– *Kyrie eleison*

8. **Metropolitan Gennadios** (*Patriarchate of Alexandria*) - Jesus Christ, look upon your family. We entrust to you all those whom you nourish and strengthen with your Word of life.

**Metropolit Serafim** (*Romanian Orthodox Church*) - For catechists, committed lay people, the brothers and sisters of religious communities and all the pastors of your Church that, in your footsteps, they may become increasingly servants of communion, we pray to you!

– *Kyrie eleison*

**Song:** *Bénissez le Seigneur* (Canticle of Daniel)

**Archbishop Justin Welby (Anglican Communion):**

*As our Saviour taught us, so we pray:*

Each person prays the **Our Father** in their own language

**Song:** *Magnificat III*

**Words of Pope Francis**

The twelve Heads of the Churches/Christian Leaders receive some seeds, as a sign of the seeds of unity/synodality, to plant at home and make them grow (cf. 1 Cor 3:6: "I planted, Apollo watered, but it was God who made it grow").

All stand.

**Concluding prayer** by Pope Francis together with the Church leaders

Church leaders:

*God our Father, we thank you for all your gifts, especially the gift of marvelling at your creation. Allow us to care for it and to walk together as brothers and sisters in peace!*

Assembly: *Amen!*

Church leaders:

*Jesus, the Christ, we thank you for giving your life right up to the cross. By your Resurrection, you are the source of abundant life. May we welcome you and follow you in the service of others!*

Assembly: *Amen!*

Church leaders:

*Holy Spirit, breath of Pentecost, you send us to proclaim Christ and to welcome into our communities those who do not yet know him. Come down, we pray, upon the participants of the Synod and upon all who are present, filling them with your wisdom and courage in order to be servants of communion and bold witnesses of your forgiveness in today's world!*

Assembly: *Amen!*

Together with Pope Francis, the Christian leaders give the blessing together:

*May almighty God bless you, the Father +, and the Son +, and the Holy + Spirit.*

**Song:** *Adoramus te, O Christe*, the Church leaders pray for a moment before the cross to express that Christ unites us through the gift of his life.

**Song:** *Tu sei sorgente viva* to invoke the Holy Spirit on the Synod participants.

Further songs will follow.

After 20 minutes, the Cross will be brought down from the raised area in front of the Basilica to the foot of the steps. All who wish go up to pray around the cross and entrust to Christ both their own burdens and situations of suffering in the world.