

Embracing Dialogue and Diversity in Synodal Practices

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Synod on Synodality is a journeying together of the People of God, summoned by the Lord Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel. It is an opportunity for the Church to live the experience of life in communion and dialogue between the charisms and ministries at the service of the Kingdom. This communion and dialogue are expressed in mutual learning and journeying together and is rooted in gospel proclamation, service to the poor, care for our common home, and ongoing theological research and reflection.

As the Synthesis document published at the end of the Synod Assembly in Rome in October 2023 states: “Synodality can be understood as Christians walking in communion with Christ toward the Kingdom along with the whole of humanity. Its orientation is towards mission, and its practice involves gathering in assembly at each level of ecclesial life. It involves reciprocal listening, dialogue, community discernment, and creation of consensus as an expression that renders Christ present in the Holy Spirit, each taking decisions in accordance with their responsibilities (1.h.). Since synodality is ordered to mission, Christian communities are to enter into solidarity with those of other religions, convictions and cultures.

The experience of Synod and the spiritual accompaniment, starts with the discernment that calls us to follow the Lord more closely. It is endowed with *parrhesia* and courage to seek new synodal paths for the Church of our times. The Synod brings together the experiences of discernment in common and sincere listening to the people of God. It expresses the faces and voices of countless people who participated in the experience.

Pope Francis’ apostolic constitution *Episcopalis Communio* (EC) has a prayer which reveals his aspiration for a fully synodal Church. The Pope writes: “For the Synod Fathers we ask the Holy Spirit first of all for the gift of listening: to listen to God, that with him we may hear the cry of the people; to listen to the people until we breathe with the desire to which God calls us” (EC 6).

In this prayer we discern three fundamental principles: Firstly, Listening is a gift and a grace. It presupposes a prayerful attitude, an attitude of openness, for it is God who grants it to us. We enter into an experience of sincere listening when we take off our sandals before the holy ground where we encounter God.

Secondly, listening is a way of recognizing God as the centre of the synodal process and seeing ourselves as his co-workers. Listening brings us to an awareness of the cry of the people, not our own voice or self-referential ideas. The Holy Spirit works through the voice of the people. The Spirit is always dynamic and fosters a variety of gifts and charisms.

Thirdly, only by listening to the people will we be able to discern the will of God. In this way the *sensus fidei* is found in the cry of God's people living faith in Jesus. Only by stepping out of our closed and safe spaces can we meet the people of God who cry out, who wait and who have much to say, expressing God's own desire for the Church.

Our growing inability to respond to the signs of the times — both those of the world and those of the Church — leads us to recognize that we are sinners, walking in deep darkness and in need of conversion and redemption.

The Synod calls to eschew clericalism, abuses and misuse of power; to recognise the rightful role of women, youth, laity, and to recognise our baptism as our fundamental identity.

We are also called to find ways to proclaim Jesus in this new time; the urgency of developing new ministries, creating ecclesial structures adapted to the present reality that make possible opportunities for the marginalized, especially indigenous peoples, migrants and refugees, those who live on the periphery.

In this dialogue is rooted in mutual listening and conversion. Those participated in the synodal processes have testified that they experienced the power of conversion found in listening to others, being heard by others, discerning and dreaming new paths together under the power of the Holy Spirit.

It must be emphasised that the mission of the Church is not synodality but the following of Jesus. However, without synodality it is impossible to follow Jesus fully and in communion with others. In other words, synodality is an indispensable means, but still a means, with the sole purpose of re-energizing the following of the Lord in our Church for the building of the Kingdom in a wounded world.

The most significant aspect of this ongoing experience is the question: “In what ways have we been transformed – personally, communally and as a Church – by the experience of encountering and listening to the God of life through the real voices of God's people, especially the most ‘unlikely,’ and toward what new paths are we being guided?”

If we do not experience a sincere conversion (*metanoia*), the synodal process will be futile. No final document, no list of challenges and pastoral guidelines, no methodological or operational element of the Assembly will have any meaning or value if it does not give us a deeper awareness of being called to follow Christ more closely.

Let us conclude this brief reflection with an excerpt from the Adsumus Prayer in which we invoke the Holy Spirit:

Make yourself at home in our hearts
Teach us the way we must go

And how we are to pursue it... Let us find in You our unity
So that we may journey together to eternal life.

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