XVI
ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS
FIRST SESSION
OCTOBER 4-29, 2023 VATICAN CITY

SECRETARIA GENERALIS SYNODI

A SYNODAL CHURCH IN MISSION

SYNTHESIS REPORT

Synod 2021 2024

INTRODUCTION

Dear Sisters, dear Brothers

"For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1 Cor 12:13). This is the experience, full of joy and gratitude, that we have had in this First Session of the Synodal Assembly held from 4 to 29 October 2023 on the theme "For a Synodal Church. Communion, Participation, Mission". Despite our diversity of backgrounds, languages and cultures, through the common grace of Baptism we have been able to live these days together with one heart and spirit. We have sought to sing like a choir, many voices as though expressing one soul. The Holy Spirit has gifted us with an experience of the harmony that He alone can generate; it is a gift and a witness in a world that is torn and divided.

Our Assembly has taken place while wars both old and new have raged in the world, with dramatic consequences that are impacting upon countless victims. The cry of those who are poor resounded among us, of those forced to migrate and of those suffering violence and the devastating consequences of climate change. We heard their cry not only through the media, but also through the voices of many present, who are personally involved in these tragic events whether through their families or their people. We have all, at all times, taken this cry into our hearts and prayers, wondering how our Churches can foster paths of reconciliation, hope, justice and peace.

Our meeting took place in Rome, gathered around the successor of Peter, who confirmed us in our faith and encouraged us to be audacious in our mission. It was a grace to begin these days with an ecumenical vigil, which saw the leaders and representatives of the other Churches and Christian communities praying together with the Pope at the tomb of Peter. Unity ferments silently within the Holy Church of God; we see it with our own eyes, and we bear witness to it full of joy. "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity" (Ps 133:1).

At the behest of the Holy Father, the Assembly saw other members of the People of God gathered together and around the bishops. The bishops, united among themselves and with the Bishop of Rome, made manifest the Church as a communion of Churches. Lay people, those in consecrated life, deacons and priests were, together with the bishops, witnesses of a process that intends to involve the whole Church and everyone in the Church. Their presence reminded us that the Assembly is not an isolated event, but an integral part and a necessary step in the synodal process. The multiplicity of interventions and the plurality of positions voiced in the Assembly revealed a Church that is learning to embrace a synodal style and is seeking the most suitable ways to make this happen.

It is more than two years since we began the journey that has led us to this Session. After the opening of the synodal process on 9 October 2021, all the Churches, albeit at different paces, have engaged in a listening process at diocesan, national and continental stages, the results of which were recorded in their respective documents. This Session opened the phase in which the entire Church received the fruits of this consultation in order to discern, in prayer and dialogue, the paths that the Spirit is asking us to follow. This phase will last until October 2024, when the Second Session of the Assembly will complete its work, offering it to the Holy Father.

The entire journey, rooted in the Tradition of the Church, is taking place in the light of conciliar teaching. The Second Vatican Council was, in fact, like a seed sown in the field of the world and the Church. The soil in which it germinated and grew was the daily lives of believers, the experience of the Churches of every people and culture, the many testimonies of holiness, and the reflections of theologians. The Synod 2021-2024 continues to draw on the energy of that seed and to develop its potential. The synodal path is, in fact, implementing what the Council taught about the Church as Mystery and People of God, called to holiness. It values the contribution all the baptised make, according to their respective vocations, in helping us to understand better and practice the Gospel. In this sense, it constitutes a true act of further reception of the Council, prolonging its inspiration and reinvigorating its prophetic force for today's world.

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