

Translation from the original text

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ENGLISH

A SYNODAL CHURCH FOR MISSION

PATHS OF SPIRITUAL, FORMATIVE AND PASTORAL CONVERSION



DOSSIERS

The idea of “missionary synodality”

From “doing for” to “being with”

Rossano Sala

This is the first issue of NPG in 2020. We are at the start of the third decade of the third millennium. No one can say with certainty what will happen, either socially or within the Church, over the next ten years. You may have noticed that there is no editorial in this issue. This is because this Dossier is, in fact, a “long editorial” that opens the decade 2020–2030. It is therefore a programmatic piece, intended to usher in the next ten years with a renewed impetus centred on the idea of “missionary synodality”. In this way, we are simply taking on board the outcome of the Synod with and for young people and relaunching it with courage, convinced that it is truly a precious and indispensable interpretative key for the years ahead. Certainly, from the various signs that have reached us over the past decade, the call for communion, sharing and co-responsibility from every perspective has been clear. The world is increasingly a small village where everything is connected and accessible. The Church, living in this world, cannot help but engage with these conditions in carrying out its mission. Over the past decade, many bridges have been torn down and just as many walls have been built. It seems to us that the time has come to try to reverse this trend, at least starting with what depends on us: we must tear down walls and build bridges! Young people are asking us at every level to be, or to become as soon as possible, “prophets of fraternity”. If this does not happen, the Church as a whole will become increasingly insignificant to them and to everyone. This is the fundamental reason why the NPG 2020–2030 decade opens with this Dossier on “missionary synodality”. This is an expression that took shape during the Synod on Young People and is clearly articulated in the Final Document: we must take it seriously if we truly wish to be faithful to our common, fraternal and missionary vocation. We are the Church because we have one Master who makes us all brothers (cf. Mt 23:8) and sends us out together on mission (cf. Mt 28:16–20). Missionary synodality marks a systemic approach to pastoral reality: we are not simply invited to take charge of some aspect of our existence and our mission, but we are called to adopt an alternative and prophetic way of inhabiting the world and of moving forward together as the Church.

Young people have strongly urged us to embrace this fraternal and missionary conversion, where walking together is already a sign of the presence of the Kingdom of God among us. For it is precisely in the journey made together that we are healed, that we are converted, as Pope Francis rightly stated in his homily on 13 October 2019, commenting on the Gospel passage of the healing of the ten lepers (Lk 17:11–19):

In today’s brief Gospel, there are several verbs of motion. It is quite striking that the lepers are not healed as they stand before Jesus; it is only afterwards, as they were walking. The Gospel tells us that: “As they went, they were made clean” (v. 14). They were healed by going up to Jerusalem, that is, while walking uphill. On the journey of life, purification takes place along the way, a way that is often uphill since it leads to the heights. Faith calls for journey, a “going out” from ourselves, and it can work wonders if we abandon our comforting certainties, if we leave our safe harbours and our cosy nests. Faith increases by giving, and grows by taking risks. Faith advances when we make our way equipped with trust in God. Faith advances with humble and practical steps, like the steps of the lepers or those of Naaman who went down to bathe in the river Jordan (cf. 2 Kings 5:14-17). The same is true for us. We advance in faith by showing humble and practical love, exercising patience each day, and praying constantly to Jesus as we keep pressing forward on our way. There is a further interesting aspect to the journey of the lepers: they move together. The Gospel tells us that, “as they went, they were made clean” (v. 14). The verbs are in the plural. Faith means also walking together, never alone.

It is the shared journey that converts us, changes our perspective, and invites us to embrace wholeheartedly the communal dimension of faith as a source of life and a criterion of truth. At the Synod we accompanied one another, young people and adults, particular Churches and the universal Church. And this led us to see things in a new light. In my view, we must start afresh from here. It will take patience, courage and prudence to truly be and become a synodal Church for mission.

This is why the subtitle of this Dossier speaks of “paths of spiritual, formative and pastoral conversion”. The order is not random: we start from our heart, from our inner self, because it is there – in our spirit – that true conversion takes place. If we do not reach consciousness and freedom, we do not truly touch the human person at their very core. So we start with spiritual conversion. And then we move on to formation, because we must be formed for missionary synodality, which cannot be improvised: learning to work routinely as a team; practising that empathetic capacity for listening which is so necessary today; implementing the discipline of living and working together; rethinking the Church as a place of fruitful exchange of gifts; entering into the logic of forgiveness and mutual correction; placing fraternal life at the centre. Pastoral care as a whole is therefore called to become a concrete expression of a way of ‘being with’ young people rather than ‘doing for’ young people. Here are some key ideas to guide us and prepare us for reading the central section of this Dossier – the article by Nathalie Becquart, former head of the service for evangelisation and vocational animation at the French Bishops’ Conference, auditor at the Synod and consultant to the Synod Secretariat – which helps us to enter into that way of living and walking together that has characterised the entire synodal process.

The lesson of the synodal journey

What took place during the three-year period from 2016 to 2019 cannot and must not be dismissed as if nothing had happened. What has this journey taught us? “To teach” means “to leave a mark”: if something truly significant happened at the Synod, it must leave a mark. And if a Synod does not leave a mark and does not leave its mark on us, it means that it was insignificant. Every Synod should be a call and an aid to the Church’s conversion to its identity and mission. From what I have experienced, for those of us engaged in youth ministry, it seems to me that the fundamental lesson of this Ordinary Synod on young people was this: the issue of young people is not a matter for youth ministry alone but for the Church as such. Young people have challenged us regarding the face of the Church as a whole. In this sense, youth ministry – both in terms of practice and reflection – can only be a permanent laboratory of the Church’s pastoral care and for the Church. Its present and its future are at stake. For, in this changing era, engaging in youth ministry means more than ever engaging with the future of the Church, as well as that of society. Just as Pope Francis suggested to us in a significant passage of his address on 3 October 2018, the first day of the Synodal Assembly. Let us therefore commit ourselves to seeking to ‘engage with the future’, and to ensure that this Synod yields not merely a document – which is generally read by few and criticised by many – but above all concrete pastoral proposals, capable of fulfilling the Synod’s very purpose: to nurture dreams, inspire prophecies and visions, bring hopes to fruition, foster trust, to bind up wounds, to weave relationships, to bring about a dawn of hope, to learn from one another, and to create a positive vision that enlightens minds, warms hearts, restores strength to hands, and inspires young people – all young people, without exception – with a vision of a future filled with the joy of the Gospel. We have breathed this desire to engage with the future throughout the three years of synodal work. One cannot speak of this Synod without speaking of adults, of liturgy, of catechesis and of charity; one cannot take seriously what has happened without questioning the departmentalised approach that so often characterises the fragmentation of pastoral care; one cannot help but think critically about the relationship between daily life and isolated pastoral events; it is impossible to imagine a youth ministry that does not take the vocational dimension as its central focus, without forgetting its popular character; above all, we cannot silence young people’s demands for ecclesial transparency regarding abuses of every kind and the consequent call to holiness, which must be rediscovered in all its driving force. I do not

know to what extent youth ministry, in its current form, is ready to engage in a holistic pastoral approach, moving beyond a certain isolation and specialisation it has experienced in previous decades and which it also risks continuing to experience in these early decades of the new millennium. We feel a strong call to move away from a somewhat overly accommodating ‘postmodern’ style that seeks one event after another, and to embrace with conviction a pastoral approach of educational accompaniment, which is ultimately the only suitable foundation for a Christian proclamation rooted in everyday life. I do not even know to what extent the Church as such is ready to allow itself to be challenged by youth ministry and, above all, by young people themselves, who over the last three years have been as respectful as they have been clear in provoking everyone to rethink the Church’s pastoral care in a new way, entering into the epochal change we are experiencing with renewed hearts and minds.

The roots and goal of missionary synodality

Where does the theme of synodality for mission come from? The answer is clear and unambiguous: it is the ripe fruit of the Synodal Assembly. Indeed, if we look back at the Synod’s *Instrumentum laboris*, the question posed there concerned the form of the Church most suited not only to the young people of the third millennium, but also to the world in which we live. The response to this call brought to the fore this idea concerning the Church’s very being, even before its actions. It concerns its face, its internal and external mechanisms of operation. It is interesting that at the Synod, with the help of young people, we moved from the perspective of the ‘preferential option for young people’ – championed above all by the Latin American Church – to that of ‘missionary synodality’ – championed by no one in particular and emerging as a new insight from the Spirit speaking to the Church. If we think about it carefully, the first perspective does not call into question the subject of the Church, whilst the second focuses its attention precisely on the face of the Church. If ‘pastoral care’ is indeed dictated by three dynamics that must interact in ever-new ways – the Gospel of the Kingdom, the recipients of the proclamation, and the form of the Church – the Synod sought to press the accelerator precisely on this last aspect, which acts as the link between the first and the second. Indeed, this is the weak link on which the Second Vatican Council has yet to find its specific realisation. If we look around, discussions within the Church regarding the form of the Church in the contemporary world are lively and spirited, though frankly at times lacking in respect and clearly failing to listen to the respective arguments put forward in support of one’s own vision. So it is clear: ‘missionary synodality’ stems from a synodal assembly listening to the Spirit, which has highlighted that young people – the recipients and protagonists of the proclamation – and the Gospel – the Kingdom mysteriously present within the fabric of humanity – are not the primary issue. At the dawn of the third millennium, the call remains to be a synodal Church for mission. What is the goal of this “missionary synodality”? I shall leave the floor to Pope Francis, who, with great clarity, summed up an intense month of work. On the final day of the Synodal Assembly, 28 October 2018, during the Angelus that followed the splendid closing celebration of the Synod, he said:

The results of this labour are already ‘fermenting’, as grape juice does in the barrels after the harvest. The Synod of young people was a good harvest and promises good wine. But I would like to say that the first fruit of this Synod Assembly should be seen in the very method that was sought to be followed, beginning with the preparatory phase. A synodal style that does not have as its primary purpose the writing of a document, which is also valuable and useful. More than the document, however, it is important to promote a way of being and working together, young and old, in listening and in discernment, in order to arrive at pastoral choices that respond to reality. (Francis, 28 October 2018, Angelus)

A way of living and working together that makes a difference. This is the goal to be achieved: that prophecy of fraternity which marks the difference between the world and the Lord’s disciples. And if this difference is not noticeable, it means that we are a watered-down Church, a worldly Church, a Church that has lost its very essence.

The transformation of the synodal question

During the synodal journey, we experienced a genuine conversion regarding the question we were to answer. At the very start of the journey, we all had more or less this perspective of thought and action in our hearts, linked to what we must do: the question was “What must we do for young people?”. It was the question of those who see young people as lost, confused, fragmented, swept along and manipulated. It was the question of those who, with honesty and dedication, truly want to work for their sake: to educate them with patience, to help them discern, not to abandon them to danger, to encourage them to make courageous choices, to support them in the struggle for a different world. All of this is evidently true and good, but perhaps the overall perspective was not entirely correct. This question betrayed a ‘doing for’ that placed us in a certain position of unilateral superiority. ‘We have something they do not have and which we are called to give them’—this was, in a way, the premise. Gradually, the question transformed. Step by step, we arrived at this other question: ‘Who are we called to be with young people?’. It is no small matter, if we think about it properly. First and foremost, it is a shift from doing to being. It is about being disciples of the Lord, and not playing at being prophets without paying the price ourselves: being refers to a witness before a word, to a lived reality before a pastoral practice to be put into action, to a good life before good words. It is about being, as the Church, the “youthfulness of the world”, and not playing the sad game of “youthism”, which leaves young people with no ground beneath their feet; it is about being proper adults, and not adulterated people, incapable of caring for young people in a mature way. Then there is the decisive shift from “for young people” to “with young people”. I understand the desire to help young people, the passion for them and the honest investment of ecclesial and civic time and energy on their behalf. But without their intimate involvement and the necessary trust that must be placed in them, we will not get very far. It is not a trivial ‘desire for the limelight’ that young people have asked of us and, it seems to me, they have not placed themselves at the centre of the stage. Rather, it is a Church duty to make young people co-responsible for the mission alongside all of us. The great figures of the Spirit who worked for young people set out trusting in them: they regarded them as fellow travellers, not passive recipients to be led somewhere. They taught young people to become aware of their talents and to take courageous risks in using them for the good of others. They invited them to take charge of their own lives, to see themselves as living beings of freedom who must choose the good and pursue it, whatever the cost. They treated them as authentic persons: loved by God and therefore called to enter into a covenant with Him for service and generosity towards those who have received less from life. This shift in perspective invites us to enter into the vocational dimension of existence, to think of youth ministry in vocational terms. Young people, as creatures and as the baptised, possess a dignity that cannot be set aside, but must be recognised, appreciated and valued. The theme of vocational discernment, which in the early stages of the Synod risked veering towards individualism, has broadened to recognise the ecclesial community as the proper setting for discernment and for young people’s commitment to a better world. In this transformation of the question – made possible when we allowed ourselves to be led by the Spirit – we were invited to be less a Church that does many things for others, sometimes in an obsessive-compulsive manner, and more a Church capable of being with people, happy to spend time and to grow by walking together. And why not, too, to be in the simple, joyful and serene company of God, enjoying that *fruitio Dei* which can rejuvenate the Church and enable it to savour the joy of the Gospel anew.

The need to enter into the rhythm of “missionary synodality”

In short, young people have helped us to reopen the file on synodality, which in many respects is nothing other than taking up the prophetic vision of the Second Vatican Council. Synodality, if we think about it properly, is a three-way game. This is very well expressed in the explanatory note on “missionary synodality” – the only note in the entire Final Document – included precisely to clarify that when we speak of synodality, we are not pursuing a democratic version of the Church, nor are we compromising

on the issue of authority within the Church. It is, however, true, in a positive sense, that synodality brings to the fore an authentic vision of the Church as the “People of God” called to a “missionary communion”. The note to the text elaborates on a quotation from a very recent document on synodality (International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 2 March 2018, no. 9) contained in no. 118 of the Final Document (“Making a synodal Church a reality is an indispensable precondition for a new missionary energy that will involve the entire People of God”). Here is the full text of that note. The document further illustrates the nature of synodality in these terms:

*“It is possible to go deeper into the theology of synodality on the basis of the doctrine of the sensus fidei of the People of God and the sacramental collegiality of the episcopate in hierarchical communion with the Bishop of Rome. This ecclesiological vision invites us to articulate synodal communion in terms of "all", "some" and "one". On different levels and in different forms, as local Churches, regional groupings of local Churches and the universal Church, synodality involves the exercise of the sensus fidei of the universitas fidelium (all), the ministry of leadership of the college of Bishops, each one with his presbyterium (some), and the ministry of unity of the Bishop of Rome (one). The dynamic of synodality thus joins the communitarian aspect which includes the whole People of God, the collegial dimension that is part of the exercise of episcopal ministry, and the primatial ministry of the Bishop of Rome. This correlation promotes that singularis conspiratio between the faithful and their Pastors, which is an icon of the eternal conspiratio that is lived within the Trinity.” (International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, 2 March 2018, no. 64).*

Here is the three-way interplay: the ‘all’, that is, the members of the People of God who have received the gift of the Spirit; the ‘some’, namely the episcopal collegiality, those called to the service of authority in the particular Church; and the ‘one’, the successor of Peter, called to exercise a presidency in charity for the good of all and of each individual. If we look at the three parties involved, we can clearly see how the three main documents produced during the synodal journey offer us three different perspectives that point to a higher unity which cannot be reduced to the sum of their parts. It is evident that the *Instrumentum laboris*, the fruit of two years of listening to the people of God – with a particular and logical emphasis on young people – provides us with a broad and comprehensive platform for a Church that has sought not only to listen, but above all to give a voice to everyone. In this way, the entire people of God, without exception, have made their voices heard. It is equally evident that the Final Document has as its principal actors the ‘few’, that is, the College of Bishops. Certainly there were young auditors and other representatives, but the Synod – consistent with its establishment in 1965 – is first and foremost a ‘Synod of Bishops’, where the ‘few’ have been the protagonists and have offered their specific perspective as pastors. Finally, one cannot deny the uniqueness of the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation “*Christus vivit*”, the fruit of Pope Francis’s own sensibility, which rightly draws the threads together and exhorts the universal Church to move forward, pointing out paths and urging us not to grow weary of doing good. It is he, a man of flesh and blood, with his own cultural and ecclesial background, who has reviewed the journey undertaken and has reinterpreted and relaunched it in a personal way. These three perspectives must remain in a fruitful and productive tension. Taking these differences into account in the spirit of the exchange of gifts means embracing ‘missionary synodality’ in a conscious and responsible manner. None of these three texts can be reduced to or equated with the others: rather, each is a carriage of a train which, to be such, needs other carriages.

Let us move forward with courage and conviction

It is well known that one of Pope Francis’s major programmatic addresses, which found its way into the Final Document of the Synod, is the Address for the Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Synod of Bishops on 17 October 2015. These are just a few pages that would be worth keeping in mind from time to time, for they contain indications for the future that appear like a small rudder guiding us not only for the coming years, but for an entire millennium:

From the beginning of my ministry as Bishop of Rome, I sought to enhance the Synod, which is one of the most precious legacies of the Second Vatican Council.(1) For Blessed Paul VI, the Synod of Bishops was meant to reproduce the image of the Ecumenical Council and reflect its spirit and method.[...] We must continue along this path. The world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission. It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.

A programmatic address, as I was saying, from which to set out anew. It states that synodality is a constitutive element of the Church and that the Church's form must be that of an 'inverted pyramid'. It states that authority must be a condition and a space for everyone to be heard and to express themselves – first and foremost, listening to the Holy Spirit! – that is, a guarantee of freedom for all. At least a few passages must be heard in full, for any commentary would risk diminishing their freshness and positive intent:

A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening "is more than simply hearing". It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the "Spirit of truth" (Jn 14:17), in order to know what he "says to the Churches" (Rev 2:7). [...] Synodality, as a constitutive element of the Church, offers us the most appropriate interpretive framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry itself. If we understand, as Saint John Chrysostom says, that "Church and Synod are synonymous", inasmuch as the Church is nothing other than the "journeying together" of God's flock along the paths of history towards the encounter with Christ the Lord, then we understand too that, within the Church, no one can be "raised up" higher than others. On the contrary, in the Church, it is necessary that each person "lower" himself or herself, so as to serve our brothers and sisters along the way. Jesus founded the Church by setting at her head the Apostolic College, in which the Apostle Peter is the "rock" (cf. Mt 16:18), the one who must confirm his brethren in the faith (cf. Lk 22:32). But in this Church, as in an inverted pyramid, the top is located beneath the base. Consequently, those who exercise authority are called "ministers", because, in the original meaning of the word, they are the least of all. It is in serving the people of God that each bishop becomes, for that portion of the flock entrusted to him, vicarius Christi, the vicar of that Jesus who at the Last Supper bent down to wash the feet of the Apostles (cf. Jn 13:1-15). And in a similar perspective, the Successor of Peter is nothing else if not the servus servorum Dei. Let us never forget this!

So says this programmatic address by Pope Francis, taken up in the Final Document at no. 118. We are only at the beginning; let us not be afraid, we still have some 980 years ahead of us to become a truly synodal Church for the mission! It will require "spiritual, pastoral and missionary conversion", as the title of paragraph 118 of the Final Document aptly states. It will require patience and prudence, determination and courage. We may move forward and backward, fall and rise again, but the direction remains clear, for it is a call from God that we can no longer ignore.

A conversion that concerns each and every one of us

Looking at the path to which we are called, the question arises spontaneously: "Are we ready for the synodal turning point in the Church?". It is clearly not easy to answer, but we can sketch out some thoughts and, above all, leave this question open, as it is addressed to all of us so that it may instil in us that "healthy unease" which keeps us sensitive to the Spirit and attentive to our times. I refer both to my personal experience and to the objective outcome of the vote on the Final Document of 27 October 2018. First of all, my personal experience at the Synod, in which I had the privilege of participating as Special Secretary. In the synodal discernment of October 2018, 'missionary synodality' did not emerge of its own accord. It was not immediately apparent to the group of experts, who had the difficult task of summarising the contributions in the hall from all the Synod Fathers and all the auditors (around 350 people in total), from the 14 small groups that met three times (producing a total of 42 contributions of varying lengths), and from the open discussions at the end of each working day. It was clearly present almost everywhere, yet it was also camouflaged. It had a strong yet discreet presence, and we had to bring

it out into the open to identify it clearly. It was a genuine work of discernment in the Spirit. When it was presented in the first draft of the Final Document, ‘missionary synodality’ drew both support and criticism, though in the end it withstood the attacks well and grew stronger throughout the Synodal Assembly. On this topic, we witnessed – particularly in the final days – the most enlightened, applauded, moving and inspiring contributions. We saw the Assembly of Bishops rise to their feet, moved by certain prophetic words that truly foreshadowed and touched upon the future we all dream of. We have also witnessed some closed-mindedness and criticism. Sometimes due to terminological misunderstandings and cultural and contextual differences that are more than understandable, at other times to genuine resistance to the Spirit. Be that as it may – and here I turn to the objectivity of the figures – regarding the theme of “synodality”, the traffic light has not been a solid green. In other words, we are not yet truly ready to take on the path of synodality. If we look at the final vote, all the numbers that directly mention or refer to synodality – see at least nos. 55, 118–127 and 148 163–164 – received an average of around thirty “non placet” votes out of approximately 260 eligible voters, with the lowest score of 51 “non placet” votes for number 121, aptly titled “The Synodal Form of the Church”. Certainly, these figures must lead us to conclude that the universal Church as a whole – and the episcopate in particular – is not yet fully ready or willing to embark on the path of synodality. Fear of a possible “loss of power”? A sign of a “clericalism” that is hard to eradicate? A legitimate request for clarification on the meaning and specific content of “synodality” and its practice in the ordinary life of the Church? A lack of maturity in the face of the times we are living in? It is difficult to say with certainty what lies behind it, but there is no shortage of resistance. Certainly, it is not merely a matter of “some”, that is, of episcopal collegiality and the ordained ministers who collaborate with them. We must ask ourselves to what extent the people of God as a whole, that is, “everyone”, in the form of the laity – and also of young people – are not in the same situation of perplexity and disengagement regarding “synodality”, precisely because clericalism itself is a team game, where some feel they are masters of everything and others, out of convenience or irresponsibility, let others carry on as if nothing were amiss. Finally, it is also a matter of the “one”, that is, the successor of Peter. And also of his Curia, that is, of those who are his closest and most immediate collaborators and who accompany him in his demanding ministry. Even excessive centralism can be an obstacle and a hindrance to the development of a true synodal culture. Perhaps two ecclesial groups are more receptive and better prepared for synodality. Certainly women, who have shown a particular sensitivity to the themes of communion, sharing and co-responsibility, and have distinguished themselves in the synodal journey for this very reason. And then there are men and women in consecrated life, who by their very nature live and work in community, that is, together, seeking – amidst all the obvious struggles and failures they experience – to shine as “prophets of fraternity” in the Church and in the world. Certainly, it requires maturity of faith in the entire People of God, in all its ministers, in the College of Bishops and in the Roman Curia, and also in the Successor of Peter. We are not yet in the ideal conditions to develop a “missionary synodality” in the Church, but certainly the synodal journey with and for young people that we have experienced over the last three years helps us to untangle some knots, to create the spiritual and pastoral conditions for a change of pace at all levels, and to glimpse some fruitful light of renewal. It has certainly helped us to understand that this is the path we must follow together.

The Synod on Young People: A Laboratory of Synodality

A reflection on Pope Francis's key text on synodality from the recent Synod of Bishops

Nathalie Becquart, xmcj

On 28 October 2018, the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on “*Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment*”—generally referred to (following Pope Francis) as the “*Synod on Young People*”[1]—concluded in Rome, with participants aware that they had experienced an important historical milestone in the Church’s synodal journey. Symbolically, the entrance and exit processions during the closing celebration in St Peter’s Basilica, presided over by Pope Francis, which for the first time brought together all the auditors and experts—lay and religious, men and women, young and old—alongside the synod fathers, bishops and priests, made tangibly visible what had truly been experienced during this Synod: a synodal Church. A Church on the move—the Church of the People of God—in which everyone has a voice and participates actively, whatever their age, gender or state of life. That is to say, a Church of co-responsibility which, in partnership, collaboration, fraternity and mutual listening, discerns together the voice of the Holy Spirit calling her to respond to the missionary challenges of our time. Thus, we emerged from this month of the Roman Assembly with inexpressible joy and with the firm conviction that synodality—“the constitutive dimension of the Church”[2]—is truly a key for proclaiming and transmitting the faith today. For this extraordinary experience of the universal Church, lived as a kind of “*new Pentecost*”, in the spirit of the Second Vatican Council, has given us a clear awareness of the call to live out and unfold synodality as the “missionary style” of the Church in addressing the challenges of the contemporary world. For this reason, the drafters of the Final Document of the Synod[3] were led to dedicate an entire chapter to this theme of “*missionary synodality*”, putting into words the journey we had undertaken:

“The fruit of this Synod, the choice that the Spirit has inspired in us through listening and discernment, is to walk with the young, going out towards everyone, so as to bear witness to the love of God. We could describe this process by speaking of synodality for mission, or missionary synodality: “Making a synodal Church a reality is an indispensable precondition for a new missionary energy that will involve the entire People of God.” We are dealing here with a prophecy of the Second Vatican Council, which we have yet to absorb in all its profundity and to develop in its daily implications, as Pope Francis reminds us when he says: “It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium” (Francis, Address for the Commemoration of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015). We are convinced that this choice, a fruit of prayer and debate, will allow the Church, by God’s grace, to be and to appear more clearly as the “youth of the world”.”[4]

While this may not always have been perceived as such by external observers, there is no doubt that, for the participants, this Synod constitutes an important step in this “development of synodal activity” desired by Pope Francis.[5] They thus departed from Rome for their particular Churches with the sense that, in a certain way, the Synod is only just beginning,[6] taking with them the challenge of working for the local implementation of this missionary synodality at all levels, as both a condition and a process for a renewed missionary impulse.[7]

From text to synodal practice: the innovative preparation of the 2018 Synod

This Synod of October 2018—following on from the two Synods on the family—can only be understood in the light of its two years of preparation, marked by various innovations that illustrate in a very concrete way the vision presented by Pope Francis in his key text on synodality (CS50).[8] Indeed, this document served as a compass guiding the synodal preparation. It was frequently cited as a reference text

throughout the various stages and reflections leading up to the October 2018 Synod.[9] Moreover, it largely underpins the conception of the Synod of Bishops expressed in the new Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio*, promulgated on 15 September 2018, just two weeks before the opening of the Synod on young people.[10]

In a certain sense, this Constitution consolidates developments initiated in the previous Synods on the family and may be seen as a kind of “refounding” of the Synod of Bishops, inviting us to understand it more as a process than as an event,[11] thereby highlighting the importance of both the preparatory and the reception phases. In announcing this Synod (on 6 October 2016), Pope Francis explained his decision to focus on young people aged 16–29 as “an expression of the Church’s pastoral concern for the young.” At the same time, he emphasised the great challenge of their involvement and active participation in this process, so that they might become true protagonists.

Pope Francis likely intuited that this Synod could serve as a driving force for synodality, enabling him to advance the reform of the Church he has called for since the beginning of his pontificate—a reform aimed at bringing about the missionary transformation of the Church described programmatically in *Evangelii Gaudium*. In particular, after inviting young people to “make a bit of noise in the dioceses” and asking them to be protagonists of this Synod, he opened the doors of the Church to the surprises they would surely bring. And this is precisely what we witnessed. Young people did not hesitate to “push” the Church in all the synodal meetings in which they took part.

For example, at the end of the Synod itself, they organised—on their own initiative—a thanksgiving celebration in the Paul VI Hall, leading cardinals and bishops in their dancing under the astonished and benevolent gaze of Pope Francis. In doing so, they helped to give the Church a more synodal face, opening her “to the grace of a new Pentecost.”[12]

From what I observed both in France and in Rome during the international preparatory meetings,[13] and even more during the Synod in October, this “walking together” with and for young people constituted for the Church an exemplary synodal experience—a true laboratory of practical synodality. And this is precisely the aim of this text: by rereading the experience of the 2018 Synod, I would like to highlight some essential aspects of this synodal Church that Pope Francis dreams of, as do most young Catholics[14] and many of the faithful throughout the world.

The reflections that follow, seeking to offer a pastoral commentary on CS50, aim to describe how synodality can be translated into everyday pastoral practices. We will consider synodality as an essential characteristic of the Church today, in this new phase of the reception of Vatican II opened by Pope Francis. We will thus seek to show how communal discernment must in fact become the way of life of the baptised, who are called to be missionary disciples, in order to bring about the daily realisation of this “Church that goes forth”, a Church “in a permanent state of mission”, as expressed in *Evangelii Gaudium* §25.

“A synodal Church is a Church of listening”[15]

At the heart of synodality, Pope Francis places listening—mutual listening, through which we come to listen to the Holy Spirit:

“A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening “is more than simply bearing”.(12) It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of truth” (Jn 14:17), in order to know what he “says to the Churches” (Rev 2:7).”[16]

This central affirmation of CS50 took concrete shape in the structure of the 2018 Synod, whose preparatory phase was fundamentally oriented toward listening to young people in a variety of ways. The consultation phase of the “People of God” thus assumed unprecedented proportions—though not without difficulties, depending on the country and the diocese—thanks to the innovations introduced, particularly the creation of a multilingual online questionnaire that made it possible to consult young people directly across the world and, above all, the convening of a pre-Synod meeting in Rome from 19 to 24 March 2018, which brought together 300 young people from every continent.

In many ways—directly and indirectly—through meetings, questionnaires, conferences, consultations, and so forth, young people were listened to and understood. They also clearly recognised themselves in the *Instrumentum laboris*,^[17] which draws extensively on the final document of the pre-Synod written by their representatives.^[18] But even more striking, during the Synod I was particularly moved by hearing the voice of young people resonating in the words of the bishops who spoke. Many of them—those responsible for youth ministry within their Episcopal Conferences and/or those who had taken the time to listen to young people and meet with them beforehand in preparation for the Synod—bore witness to what they had heard from young people. This enabled us to perceive what it means to “listen to his people until we are in harmony with the will to which God calls us.”^[19]

This Synod thus truly became a “privileged instrument for *listening* to the People of God”,^[20] because it made possible a real listening to young people, who for the most part “made their cry heard”, as Pope Francis had asked them to do.^[21] This was particularly evident in France,^[22] where there exists a strong synodal culture rooted in the numerous diocesan synods and synodal processes—past and ongoing. But this was also true in many other countries that launched various initiatives to involve young people in the preparation of this Synod. It was equally evident in the Synod Hall itself, where the 35 young participants—present as observers—did not hesitate to speak and were listened to with great attention.

One may even say that they played a significant role in the Synod, taking an active part in the *Circuli minores*, without hesitation in reacting, expressing their views and proposing amendments. As Fr Giacomo Costa, SJ, Special Secretary of the Synod on Young People, wrote:

“Listening is undoubtedly one of the most significant interpretative keys of the synodal journey, from its very preparation, which involved consultation with national Episcopal Conferences, reflection by a group of international experts and, above all, attention to the very voice of young people.”^[23]

Furthermore, during the Synod itself—which is, first and foremost, a prolonged exercise in listening—there was a deepening awareness that listening is truly a theological act, because we came to recognise that it is the very way in which God acts with us:

“Listening transforms the hearts of those who do it, especially when it takes place with an inner disposition of harmony and docility to the Spirit. It is not simply a source of information or a strategy for achieving a goal, but the way that God himself relates to his people. God sees the distress of his people and hears their cry; deeply moved, he comes down to deliver them (cf. Ex 3:7-8). The Church, by her listening, enters into the movement of God who, in his Son, draws near to every human being.”^[24]

In this listening to young people—which constituted the guiding thread of the entire synodal process—the Church and her pastors experienced how fundamental and fruitful such listening is when it goes beyond merely hearing, and allows one to be deeply touched by the cries, dreams, joys and sufferings of people. It is also the key to evangelisation, the indispensable step in every proclamation.

This “Church of listening” experienced during the 2018 Synod is, in fact, the fundamental characteristic of synodality. It forms part of the very attitude of the Risen Christ on the road to Emmaus, and is recognised as a call to develop, more than ever, an attitude of accompaniment among our

contemporaries—especially the youngest and the poorest, whose primary need is often simply to be listened to.[25]

A synodal Church is a missionary community at the service of all

Synodality is, in a certain sense, a property of the Church that flows from her nature as communion, since it is rooted in the Trinitarian mystery and enables the building of a more concrete and effective communion. It is an appropriate way of exercising collegiality, one that unfolds through a process of communal discernment—that is, a shared listening to the Spirit within a dynamic of seeking consensus—whose goal is intrinsically missionary and oriented toward communion.

This is clearly emphasised by Pope Francis in CS50. Synodality, precisely because it is fundamentally missionary, must be developed not primarily for reasons of internal organisation, but in response to the appeals of the “world in which we live”: a fragmented and conflictual world, marked by tensions and contradictions, which “demands that the Church strengthen synergies in all areas of her mission.”[26] A synodal Church is therefore intrinsically rooted in history and oriented toward the world:

“A synodal Church is like a standard lifted up among the nations (cf. Is 11:12) in a world which — while calling for participation, solidarity and transparency in public administration — often consigns the fate of entire peoples to the grasp of small but powerful groups. As a Church which “journeys together” with men and women, sharing the travails of history, let us cherish the dream that a rediscovery of the inviolable dignity of peoples and of the function of authority as service will also be able to help civil society to be built up in justice and fraternity, and thus bring about a more beautiful and humane world for coming generations.”[27]

Thus, from the outset, the aim of the Synod on young people was mission at the service of all young people,[28] in order to care for them more effectively.[29] The purpose of this Synod was to help the Church discern how best to reach out to and accompany young people aged 16 to 29, so as to assist them in discerning their lives and committing themselves to the service of others. All this with the conviction that young people, in today’s rapidly changing world, are key actors in the transformation of society itself.

If they are well accompanied, they will be capable of imagining and creating solutions to overcome the current impasses and crises. This Synod therefore took up the challenge of discerning more concretely the style and the paths that the Church’s mission can take with young people in today’s world, involving them extensively, since they are the primary evangelisers of other young people. Indeed, the Synod made possible the active participation of all in its work, including the auditors. We experienced with joy a form of co-responsibility in genuine collaboration with bishops and cardinals—and this bore fruit. We felt united by a common passion for young people, sharing the same desire to proclaim Christ to them and to help them discern their path in life. We tasted the joy of missionary communion, of unity in diversity.

This “spiritual bond”[30] gave us renewed energy to move forward with courage, even amid the experience of the Church’s fragility in these turbulent times of crisis. Thus, at the heart of our work, we lived something like a new Pentecost, receiving as a flame the strength of the Spirit. With burning hearts, we “went forth” from the Synod—after the vote on the Final Document[31]—like Peter and the Apostles from the Upper Room, sent on mission to all nations to transmit the fire of the Synod, unable to remain silent about what we had received. We left Rome joyful and full of hope, with “a renewed missionary zeal”[32] and a strong desire to be co-actors with young people in this missionary Church that goes out to meet all young people, with particular attention to those who are farthest away and most in difficulty.

A synodal Church is a humble Church on the path of conversion

At the Synod—particularly in the prominent context of the crisis of sexual abuse, which revealed the horror of this tragic evil committed by pastors and the immeasurable suffering of the victims—the

assembly felt the need to undertake a journey of truth: to confront the real weaknesses and problems of the Church, to acknowledge wrongs,[33] failures and sins, and to recognise that no one can move forward alone. Hence the insistence of many bishops on the need to give greater space to young people, to work more closely with the laity—especially women—and to involve them more fully in decision-making processes. In the interventions of the Synod Fathers, the joys and aspirations—but also the sufferings, sorrows and difficulties—of young people were expressed with humility and realism.

In this synodal exercise of discernment, there is a kind of rereading of ecclesial practices that reveals both the ongoing search and the proposed paths forward, but also all the difficulties the Church encounters in reaching young people in the contemporary world. There is difficulty in confronting the changes underway; a realistic recognition of existing problems, of ecclesial weaknesses and poverty, of the horror of abuses committed, of shortcomings and failures. The Synod was thus a genuine process of discernment, beginning with this first phase of “recognising”—the title of Part I of the *Instrumentum laboris*—which is a path of realistic engagement with reality through listening to and consulting the People of God—the base of the pyramid. It is a path of truth that becomes a path of conversion. Many can bear witness to this. At the Synod, we truly saw the face of a humble Church that acknowledges its fragility—a Church immersed in human reality to its very depths, a Church capable of looking at young people without fear because it is rooted in trust in the One who is the Saviour.

Thus, we truly lived this Synod—from the Greek *syn-odos*, meaning “walking together”—as a journey with brothers and sisters from all continents: a journey together in listening to the Spirit, which is above all a journey of conversion, a journey of transformation through mutual listening within a dynamic of common and collaborative searching,[34] in order to discern what the Church is called to be and to do today so as to remain faithful to her mission. The starting point of a Synod is the recognition of a problem—in this case, the awareness that most young people are generally distant from the Church. A synodal Church is a pilgrim Church, rooted in history, which places itself in a state of profound humility[35] in order to listen to the call to change, and thus to convert its pastoral and missionary practices. It enters into a process of truth that dares to identify, without fear, its own weaknesses and limitations, entrusting itself to its one Lord rather than to human strategies. Only this attitude of humility—this self-decentering—makes it possible to set aside particular interests in order to seek truly the good of the Church[36] in the service of the universal common good.

However, the interventions and exchanges during the Synod also showed that it is not easy for everyone to enter into this vision. Each bishop comes first and foremost from a particular Church, with its own concerns and problems linked to its social and ecclesial context. Differences in perspective on certain issues—such as the understanding of homosexuality or the reality of the crisis of sexual abuse—can be very significant.[37] To desire a synodal Church in the spirit of Pope Francis is to recognise that no one stands above others or possesses the truth alone; that the Holy Spirit speaks to all, giving an important place to the *sensus fidei*; and that it is necessary to “lower oneself” in order to serve in the manner of the Master, whose “only power is the power of the Cross.”

The challenge, therefore, is to implement synodality in pastoral practice and in the concrete ways of acting that embody this Church on the move—a synodal Church in which we walk together with Christ along a path of conversion, like pilgrims. To live the synodal Church means to value dialogue and teamwork, collaboration in a spirit of equality and reciprocity, the welcoming of all into inclusive communities, and the participation and interdependence of active and supportive persons—while recognising the specific role of pastors and their ministry of leadership in the service of communion. With the powerful image of the inverted pyramid, whose summit lies at the bottom, Pope Francis invites us to think beyond a worldly imagination—too often hierarchical—in which the Pope stands at the centre above the bishops, who in turn stand above the community of the baptised. Here, “those who exercise authority are called ‘ministers’: because, according to the original meaning of the word, they are the least of all.”[38]

The point is to enter more deeply into the very mystery of the Church, which cannot be reduced to a merely human community or organisation. The vision of a synodal Church is, in fact, deeply rooted in the Trinitarian mystery, which highlights the relationships of communion between the divine Persons. Synodality is lived in faith and cannot be reduced to a form of democratic parliamentary procedure. The harmony—or *symphony*—to which synodality aspires (in the Greek sense) is the fruit of the presence of Christ, who is at work through his Spirit. For this reason, it is difficult to find words to describe this profound spiritual and ecclesial experience, which leads us to a deeper understanding of the very mystery of the Church and of Trinitarian life.

My personal experience of the Synod—lived spiritually as a deeper integration into the ecclesial “we”, as a profound immersion into the very mystery of the Church—has led me to understand that synodality is undoubtedly today the very way of enabling people to taste and perceive what the Church truly is: the mystery of communion in mission. To give everyone the possibility of experiencing a Synod—or at least a synodal approach—means enabling our contemporaries, often shaped by an individualistic culture, to enter more deeply into the communal dimension, discovering ways of living together in the Church. This can also prophetically reveal ways of living together in an increasingly fragmented pluralistic society. It offers them the opportunity to root themselves more deeply in the Church: the Body of Christ, the Temple of the Spirit, the People of God. Indeed, the synodal structure of the Church is a constitutive principle, a gift of the Holy Spirit. It belongs to the very being of the Church by virtue of its Trinitarian and Eucharistic foundation. A Synod is celebrated—it begins and ends—with the Eucharist. Synodality has an intrinsic link with the Eucharist, which is the source and model of every ecclesial assembly, necessarily marked by communion.

Synodality, therefore, as an “expression of the ecclesiology of communion”, presents itself as an opportunity and a grace for all who experience it. For it is a path of conversion, a path of spiritual growth, and a path of ecclesial incorporation. This was widely testified by the young people who participated in the pre-Synod and the Synod, as well as by the Synod Fathers themselves.

A synodal Church is a participatory and co-responsible Church[39]

In his definition of the word “Synod”—“walking together: laity, pastors, the Bishop of Rome”—and throughout the rest of his address CS50, Pope Francis emphasises the unity of the People of God, beyond the distinctions between shepherds and flock, and highlights the common condition of all the baptised.[40] For this reason, he insists strongly on listening to the *sensus fidei*—and thus on the importance of broadly consulting the People of God in every synodal preparation—“since the flock too has its own ‘instinct’ for discerning the new paths that the Lord is opening up for the Church.”[41] In doing so, he underscores the intimate and inseparable bond that exists between the bishop and his people. Neither can think of or represent himself without the other. They are, in a sense, mutually interconnected in a relationship of reciprocity, called to live an ever more effective and affective communion—up to and including the Pope himself, who “does not stand alone above the Church; but within it as one of the baptised among the baptised, and within the College of Bishops as a bishop among bishops, called at the same time—as Successor of the Apostle Peter—to guide the Church of Rome, which presides in love over all the Churches.”[42]

This vision of a synodal Church, which recognises all the baptised as “active subjects of evangelisation”, highlights co-responsibility, the active participation of all, and the importance of collegial work—without seeking to flatten or eliminate differences. From this experience of collaboration and missionary communion that we have lived concretely on many occasions—both during the preparation of the Synod and throughout the Synod itself—we have received abundant fruits. This experience, by involving everyone—whatever their experience of faith or of the Church—and by making them actors in the synodal process, placed them at the centre of that “culture of encounter” so dear to Pope Francis. One

of the experts at the Synod, Chiara Giaccardi, a lay Italian professor of sociology, expresses it in these words:

“We truly walked together in a joyful and constructive way, without polemics and without seeking to erase differences. Instead, we transformed differences into opportunities for dialogue, and thus managed to reduce distances, composing a symphony with the notes of all. This very particular atmosphere that was created is the sign of a Church that knows how to regenerate itself by walking together, like a ‘caravan of solidarity’ in which relationships are more important than structures and roles. The Final Document is the result of a true teamwork in which everyone is an ‘author’: the young people, the Spirit... The great bas-relief of Pentecost in the atrium of the Paul VI Hall—where, every day during the coffee breaks, thoughts and experiences were exchanged—truly inspired the whole assembly. Beyond the result, the process is invaluable.”[43]

Thus, this Synod has given us the opportunity to see and experience, in a very concrete and existential way, how much pastoral care today requires placing relationships at the centre, because faith is transmitted only through and within encounter. Chapter II of Part III of the Final Document, entitled “Journeying together in daily life”, expresses this clearly in the subtitle: “From structures to relationships.” It is the quality and authenticity of relationships—and the very life of fraternal communities—that evangelise more than structures. We thus understand that “the commitment to build a synodal Church — a mission to which we are all called, each with the role entrusted him by the Lord — ”[44], deeply rooted in the ecclesiology of communion of the Second Vatican Council, is linked to a theology of vocation in which the diversity of charisms and ministries must be understood as the common core of the baptismal vocation, called to holiness and to participation in the one mission of the Church. We must therefore recognise that our common mission as baptised persons is always stronger than the differences arising from the multiplicity of ways of following Christ.[45]

The image of the body evoked by Saint Paul highlights, in fact, that “each member is necessary and at the same time a part of the whole.”[46] This was one of the particularly significant fruits of the Synod, which led to a deeper awareness of the dynamics of fraternity and collaboration among persons with different vocations. It also made more visible—especially through the encounter between men and women—the richness and fruitfulness of working together. For the first time in a Synod, women—including seven religious sisters[47] and about twenty young lay women—made up around ten per cent of the assembly and played a particularly active role. Their voice was recognised as precious and important by the Synod Fathers, who greatly appreciated their presence. An important step forward was thus taken. Both the pre-Synod and the Synod itself suggested that the question of women in society and in the Church is today a central issue for mission—and one that concerns not only women, but also men themselves, including bishops and cardinals. The Final Document therefore repeatedly addresses the question of women in society and in the Church, lamenting in particular the lack of a female voice or perspective, as well as the reality of discrimination against them. Thus, “the Synod recommends that everyone be made more aware of the urgency of an inevitable change, not least on the basis of anthropological and theological reflection on the reciprocity between men and women.”[48]

For the first time—perhaps in a document of this kind—the emphasis is placed on the reciprocal relationship between man and woman, moving beyond the vocabulary of complementarity and of the “feminine genius.” It also conveys a strong call to develop the presence of women in ecclesial bodies at all levels, including in positions of responsibility, and to ensure their participation in ecclesial decision-making processes—presented as “a matter of justice” in an entire paragraph dedicated to “women in the synodal Church.”[49]

During the Synod, we truly experienced this synodal style of Church, living out the circularity and reciprocity of our different vocations. The relationships of great fraternity and collaboration—marked by simplicity—lived among the members of the Synod, beginning with Pope Francis himself, who touched us all with his openness and closeness, allowed us to experience something of this image of the

inverted pyramid. Indeed, we were all engaged in a collegial work carried out in a spirit of partnership. For this reason, many of us often felt uncomfortable with the physical layout of the Synod Hall, which stood in clear contrast to this vision. The cardinals sat in the front row of the amphitheatre, in front of the president's table. Then, moving upwards, one found in succession: archbishops, bishops, auxiliary bishops, priests, religious—and finally, at the top, the laity and the young people. Many Synod Fathers would have liked to see the young people seated among them. Moreover, aware of the negative image conveyed by photographs of the hall arranged in this way—which did not reflect the synodality we were actually experiencing—many suggested that this arrangement be changed to better communicate this beautiful synodal dynamic. But this was not possible. Synodality—which requires a framework that unfolds in space and time—also calls for very practical reflection on the places where it is lived. Their concrete arrangement can either foster or hinder dialogue and communal discernment.

Likewise, the process itself and the way synodal meetings are conducted and structured have a significant impact. This Synod, for example, benefited greatly from a much-appreciated innovation: the introduction of a three-minute period of silence after every five four-minute interventions in the plenary assembly, as requested by Pope Francis.[50] Everyone highlighted the benefits and the fruitful impact of these moments of silence. Similarly, the organisation of the work on the *Instrumentum laboris*—with a full week devoted to each of its three parts—as well as the articulation between plenary sessions and group work, differed from the previous Synod on the family and had very positive effects. Several Synod Fathers who had already participated in multiple Synods testified that this Synod on young people was, for them, “the best Synod.”[51]

Conclusion: the Synod on young people, a laboratory of ecclesial life?

We have heard from the young people present—who represent a symbolic and significant part of the People of God—testimonies of faith that have edified us, and stories of salvation that have enabled us to touch firsthand the action of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who allow themselves to be transformed by their encounter with Christ. All of us—and in particular the Synod Fathers—have experienced a kind of renewal: a rejuvenation, a renewed faith, a missionary impulse, a new courage... and, ultimately, a call to dare, with boldness, to invent new ways of being Church today, in creative fidelity, so as to be closer to young people and to walk with them, entrusting them with greater responsibility in a spirit of trust. For we have come to understand more deeply that they are an integral part of the Church and also a driving force for mission.

For this reason, we must now seek, within our various ecclesial contexts, ways of involving them more fully as partners in the mission—not only, but first of all, in the evangelisation of young people. They are, in fact, an accelerator of synodality, showing us at the highest level that synodality is the key to evangelisation today.[52]

Finally, this synodal journey—centred on accompanying vocational discernment among young people—has enabled the Church to deepen several key terms expressed in Part II of the Final Document: vocation, discernment, accompaniment. Vocation (Chapter 2 of Part II) is presented as a mystery—the mystery of God's unique call addressed to each person, inviting everyone to receive their life as a gift to be given in turn to others. Vocation is thus to be lived as an adventure, a path of transformation, a continuous creation, a dynamic identity. A vocation can only be understood and received within the very vocation of the Church: a community of those who are called, composed of a rich diversity of charisms. Accompaniment, as presented in Chapter 3 of the Final Document, is the mission of the whole Church, called to accompany each person in the various choices of life (commitments, profession, state of life...). Vocational discernment is lived out within this accompaniment—both communal and personal—which today requires a stronger emphasis on the formation of qualified spiritual guides, capable of practising and transmitting to others the art of discernment.

This art of discernment—well described in Chapter 4—is a service to freedom, exercised within the realm of personal conscience and in what biblical tradition calls the “heart”, the inner place of listening and encounter with God. Yet these key words—so important for those engaged in ministry with young people—are in fact a gift for all,[53] and they foreshadow, I believe, what the concrete realisation of a synodal Church might look like today: a Church in which everyone, whatever their vocation, accompanies one another and discerns together the paths of mission in today’s world, recognising themselves as “truly linked with mankind and its history by the deepest of bonds.”[54] In this way, the Church can become ever more faithful to 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”.[55]

In the wake of the two Synods on the family and of *Amoris Laetitia*, this Synod has thus highlighted the challenge of thinking about Christian life today—within a complex world—as a style of life, namely that of discernment. Discernment is an art of living: listening to the Spirit, daring to make choices in response to the call of Christ, choices that lead along a path of freedom and liberation. Yet discernment cannot be lived alone; it can only take place in a shared listening to the Spirit with one’s brothers and sisters.

In this sense, the Synod—as a process—presents itself as a true ecclesial laboratory of discernment and fraternity, helping us to become, in a more concrete way, these “discerning” brothers and sisters, called to put into practice that missionary communion which is a “Church that goes forth.” The synodality highlighted by this Synod on young people can therefore be understood as a form of formation in this art of living together within a pluralistic Church in a pluralistic world. It is the art of living as Christians according to the missionary style of Jesus and of the first Christian communities.

This style—learned at the school of Pope Francis—places emphasis on mercy and on the common vocation of all the baptised, all called to holiness. In this synodal Church, missionary disciples—who recognise themselves as sinners, poor and fragile—discover with wonder that they are called to be witnesses through acts of mercy, because they are co-responsible for a Church always on the path of spiritual, pastoral and missionary conversion.

Notes

[1] Cf. Address of Pope Francis at the Prayer Vigil in preparation for World Youth Day, Papal Basilica of Saint Mary Major, 8 April 2017: “This evening marks a double beginning: the beginning of the journey towards the Synod—‘Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment’, but let us simply say: ‘the Synod on Young People.’”

[2] Expression used by Pope Francis in his Address for the Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops (17 October 2015).

[3] Final Document of the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops (2018), hereafter *FD*. Available at: <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2018/10/27/0789/01722.html>

[4] *FD* §118. This paragraph is often considered the “keystone” of the Final Document.

[5] Cf. Pope Francis, Address for the 50th Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops (CS50).

[6] Cf. *Episcopalis communio*, §7: The Synod Assembly is followed by a phase of implementation in the particular Churches.

[7] Cf. *FD* §118: “Spiritual, pastoral and missionary conversion”.

[8] CS50 = Pope Francis, Address for the Commemoration of the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015.

[9] The CS50 text was widely used as a reference throughout the preparatory phases of the Synod.

[10] Pope Francis, Apostolic Constitution *Episcopalis communio*, 15 September 2018.

[11] The Synod is to be understood as a process rather than a single event, highlighting preparation and reception.

[12] Cf. *FD* §§59–62: “A New Pentecost”.

[13] International preparatory meetings included: Rome (April 2017): “From Krakow to Panama”; Seminar on youth (September 2017); Pre-Synod meeting (March 2018).

[14] During the Pre-Synod, young people from different cultures expressed converging expectations regarding the Church and evangelisation.

[15] Cf. CS50.

[16] Pope Francis, CS50 (official text).

- [17] *Instrumentum laboris* of the Synod on Young People (2018), preparatory working document.
- [18] Final document of the Pre-Synod of young people (March 2018).
- [19] Cf. CS50: listening to the People in order to discern God’s will.
- [20] Cf. *Episcopalis communio*, §6: The Synod is a privileged instrument for listening to the People of God.
- [21] Cf. Pope Francis, Letter to Young People (2017): “Make your cry heard”.
- [22] France has a strong synodal tradition due to numerous diocesan synods.
- [23] Translation from Giacomo Costa, SJ, “Sinodo 2018: il dono dei giovani”, *Aggiornamenti Sociali*, 2018.
- [24] FD §6: Listening as a theological act (cf. Ex 3:7–8).
- [25] Cf. FD §7: “Young people want to be heard”.
- [26] CS50: the world calls for greater ecclesial collaboration.
- [27] CS50, with reference to Is 11:12.
- [28] Cf. Pope Francis, Address (8 April 2017): the Synod is for all young people, without exclusion.
- [29] Cf. *Instrumentum laboris*, §1: caring for young people is essential to the Church’s mission.
- [30] FD §1: expression referring to the unity experienced during the Synod.
- [31] Final vote of the FD: all paragraphs approved with qualified majority.
- [32] FD, Part III: “A Renewed Missionary Zeal”.
- [33] Examples include: Apologies to victims of abuse; Recognition of failures within the Church.
- [34] Cf. Costa, SJ: synodal discernment as a collaborative process.
- [35] Cf. International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, §112: humility is essential.
- [36] Cf. *Episcopalis communio*, §7: The goal is always the good of the Church.
- [37] Cf. voting results of the FD: controversial issues received more opposition.
- [38] CS50: authority as service—“ministers are the least”.
- [39] International Theological Commission, *Synodality*, §67.
- [40] Cf. Pope Francis, Letter to Cardinal Ouellet (2016): the Church is the People of God.
- [41] CS50: the People of God possess a “sense of faith”.
- [42] CS50: Pope as bishop among bishops, within the Church.
- [43] Translation from Chiara Giaccardi, “I giovani risvegliano la Chiesa. Note dopo il Sinodo”, *La Rivista del Clero Italiano*, 2018.
- [44] CS50: synodality as shared mission.
- [45] Cf. FD §84: unity of mission in diversity of vocations.
- [46] Cf. FD §85 (St Paul’s image of the body).
- [47] Seven religious sisters participated (see “Sisters at Synod” initiative).
- [48] FD §55: reciprocity between men and women.
- [49] FD §148: women in the synodal Church; participation is “a matter of justice”.
- [50] Pope Francis, Opening Address of the Synod (3 October 2018): introduction of silence.
- [51] Testimony of several bishops (e.g. Cardinal Aguiar Retes): “the best Synod”.
- [52] Cf. Nathalie Becquart, *Evangelising the CO Generation* (2018).
- [53] Cf. FD Part II: youth as a gift for the whole Church.
- [54] *Gaudium et Spes*, §1: “The joys and the hopes...”.
- [55] *Lumen Gentium*, §1: The Church as sacrament of unity.