



SECRETARIA GENERALIS SYNODI
DICASTERIUM PRO CLERICIS
DICASTERIUM PRO ECCLESIIS ORIENTALIBUS
DICASTERIUM PRO EVANGELIZATIONE

Parish Priests for the Synod
Sacrofano (RM)
29 April – 2 May 2024

Incontro Internazionale di Parroci
Sacrofano (Roma), 29 aprile - 2 maggio 2024
I Parroci per il Sinodo
COME ESSERE CHIESA locale SINODALE IN MISSIONE?

Saluto del Cardinale Mario Grech
Segretario Generale del Sinodo

SYNODALITY: JESUS WALKING WITH US

In her most recent book, *Reading Genesis* (2024) the American Pulitzer-prize winner Marilynne Robinson goes through the stories contained in the book of Genesis. Best known for her works of fiction, the author reads the book of Genesis as a series of stories, but not as fiction. These are *real* stories of humanity: of suffering and joy, despair and hope, sacrifice and reward, abandonment and providence, death and life. What makes these stories even more real is the fact that they are not simply the real stories of humanity. They are also the real stories of God. God's providence works in and through human stories. 'The mind of the text hovers over a very long span of time, during which an absolutely singular providence works itself out through and among human beings who are fallible in various ways and degrees and who can have no understanding of the part their lives will play in the long course of sacred history' (p. 177).

You might be wondering what *Genesis* and Marilynne Robinson have to do with our meeting today. Here is my answer. Just like book of Genesis, we are also a collection of stories. Each and everyone here is a story, brings with him a story that involves many other people, the story of the parish community entrusted to you, the story of the local church! We have very different stories, depending on our provenance, our history, the people who are involved in our work. And yet, despite all that makes us different, many are the experiences that make our stories similar: the experiences of suffering and joy, despair and hope, sacrifice and reward, abandonment and providence, death and life. Most importantly, what Robinson says about Genesis also applies to our experiences as parish priests and to the lives of our parishes: an absolutely singular providence works itself out through and among human beings who are fallible in various ways and degrees and who can have no understanding of the part their lives are playing in the long course of sacred history.

Robinson adds something important: 'these primordial stories will never end'. And I would add, they will not end, not simply because they are primordial, but because God is still writing his history. To a certain extent, his history is still without a conclusion. Providence is still working today, in our stories, in our parishes, in our dioceses and in society at large.

We have been talking a lot about synodality, and we will continue to do this over the coming days. Remember that the first and most primordial sense of the prefix *syn-* in synodality has to refer to

God. Being synodal does not simply mean walking together, but rather walking *with* God. And it would be even better to say, God walking *with* us. This is the primordial sense of synodality. Synodality is about God, before being about the Church. Jesus Christ walks with us. Our stories are human stories, but human stories in which Christ is present. They describe our paths, paths with which Jesus binds himself. They are also God's stories.

As we have stated in the *Preparatory Document for the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops* (07.09.2021) the work of evangelization would not be comprehensible without Jesus' constant openness to the widest possible audience, which the Gospels refer to as the crowd (cfr. art. 18). "Even in the diversity of the Lord's calls, their receptive responses, the common trait is that faith always emerges as a valuing of people: their plea is heard, their difficulty is helped, their availability is appreciated, their dignity is confirmed by God's gaze and restored to the community's recognition" (art. 17). This applies also to you, dear parish priests. By definition the parish priest is a man of the people and for the people; like Jesus, he is open to the crowd to help each and everyone understand that they "are a letter from Christ ... written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God" (2 Cor 3.3).

Often, it is hard to understand the way in which our stories could be the stories of God. Our parishes are probably far from being the best parish that one could wish for. Our stories are everything but perfect. No wonder we find it difficult to understand how our stories are also God's. Sometimes, we need others to help us see God's presence in our stories. That is what these days together will hopefully be all about. They're about the sharing of stories, helping one another see God's presence in our own stories, understanding that his providence is still writing the story of the Church today.

You have not come here to receive some teaching or exposition about synodality. We are not here to teach you. You have come here to tell us your story, because the story of each and everyone of you is important. We want to hear your stories, we want to hear how Jesus is still working today. They might not be perfect stories, but they are real stories, not fiction. That is what is most important. It is because your stories are real and not fiction that we want to walk with you to hear how the Lord is already walking with you and your communities today in that part of the world where you come from.

My final word: thank you. Thank you for being here. Thank you for your story. Thank you for allowing Jesus to walk with you and through you to keep writing the story of the Church today.