



General Secretariat For the Synod of Bishops



ENGLISH ORIGINAL

Transcription of the Video-Message of Cardinal Mario Grech, Secretary General for the Synod of Bishops to the Bishops of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops gathering in Baltimore for their General Assembly

Dear Brothers

I am truly pleased today to share a few thoughts with you before you start your discussion on the synod's process as the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. "The Church of God is convoked in synod" (Preparatory document, 1). This Synod is a spiritual journey, an event inspired and guided by the Spirit. The various testimonies we have received, the creativity with which the episcopal conferences, dioceses, parishes or associations are organising the consultation of the People of God, are signs confirming that the Spirit is at work.

Albeit briefly, the opportunity to address you is a gift and an opportunity for me.

A gift, because I can share with so many brothers in the Episcopate a common commitment to and concern for the Church. Pope Francis is calling us to rediscover that walking together "is the most effective way of manifesting and putting into practice the nature of the Church as the pilgrim and missionary people of God" (PD 1). Synodality is a way of being Church: it is a culture, or *forma mentis*, proper to life in the Church, making visible the core values of communion, participation and mission. By way of illustration, one can underline the following aspects of synodality:

- (a) It brings to light the palpable sense that all of us are on a common journey towards our God, in which our common humanity and the shared dignity of Baptism form the central foundation of this journeying together. At the basis of this truth, we are invited to evaluate the way of this "being together", to reflect on the nature of our relations as baptised, to rethink the relationships between the laity, consecrated persons and ordained ministries.
- (b) Synodality helps us acquire a profound recognition that in all moments of dialogue, decision making and discernment, it is God's will that we are seeking to discern and discover, not our own nor our group's. We listen to each other in order to better hear the voice of Holy Spirit speaking in our world today. To fail to listen to each one is to cripple the Church both within and therefore also without. This listening to each one in no way undermines the specific responsibility of the Bishops to lead and confirm this discernment; rather it is the necessary condition for its fruitful exercise.
- (c) Synodality pushes us to make a continuous and vigorous effort to invite everyone into deeper relationship with the Church, in all dimensions of its life. It is an effort that invites its interlocutors to discover their worth and value. Everyone is valuable: particularly marginalized individuals and communities such as refugees, migrants, the elderly, people who live in poverty, Catholics who rarely or never practice their faith, etc.
- (d) Synodality brings about an authentic ethic of listening which seeks to learn from and engage all of the members of the community in honesty and charity;
- (e) It also demands a willingness on the part of all to give up strongly held positions and goals, and to adopt a culture of dialogue and collective decision making, conscious of the fact that we can be genuinely gifted and enriched when doing so;

- (f) Synodality demands the assumption of responsibility and the readiness to recognize in all humility the ways in which the Church wounds men and women and children and families
- (g) It is an invitation for a missionary outreach of engagement with the world in which we live. The synodal path is a great path of evangelisation. Contemporary cultural, social and anthropological pluralism should lead us to ask what kind of Church do we want to present to the world today? What contribution do we have to offer to our societies? How can we do this?

As I stated above, to meet you at this particular moment of grace is an opportunity, because it is another small step in the direction of the reciprocity of relationships that the Secretariat for the Synod intends to foster.

The synodal process that began in Saint Peter's last October 10 and that each of you initiated in your own Church the following Sundays is in fact built on the "mutual interiority" of particular Churches and the universal Church. The consultation of the People of God and the discernment of the pastors takes place in the Churches, and it is from listening to the Churches that the *Instrumentum laboris* will be written and delivered to the members of the Synod Assembly in October 2023.

How decisive this reciprocity of relationships is for the Church can be understood if one considers the theological importance of the People of God. If it is true that "in every particular Church the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ is present and acts" (CD 11), it is also true that the People of God can never be understood as a mass of people that finds the possibility to express itself within the dynamics of representation typical of democratic systems.

The People of God is the totality of the baptized, articulated and manifest in *portiones Populi Dei*, each entrusted to the bishop assisted by his presbyterate. In this way, the Church which is "constitutively synodal" is also and always "constitutively hierarchical". The idea of the Fathers resurfaces, according to which - in the words of Cyprian of Carthage - "the Church is in the Bishop and the Bishop is in the Church". In this way, the entire synodal process depends on the bishop: it is he who initiates it, who accompanies it and who collects the final contribution on the theme of the Synod.

Allow me to share something with you: I think that the contributions of the Churches and the work of synthesis of the Bishops' Conferences are gifts that each Church offers to the other Churches and to the universal Church, in the logic of the principle of catholicity formulated by Vatican Council II which states that "all the faithful, scattered though they be throughout the world, are in communion with each other in the Holy Spirit, and so, he who dwells in Rome knows that the people of India are his members". [...] The Church in this is mindful that she must bring together the nations for that king to whom they were given as an inheritance, and to whose city they bring gifts and offerings" (LG 13). This great exchange of gifts will involve intense work for the Synod Secretariat. We will do it willingly, so that this communion among the Churches may grow and the Church may grow as communion.

In this logic of the exchange of gifts among the Churches, every contribution to the understanding of the Synodal Church is important. Contrary to what many assume, there are no written conclusions; there is no desire to impose a line of thinking. There is a willingness to listen to the Spirit in listening to one another. Nor do we think that there are positions that are worth more than others. The will of the Secretariat is to encourage listening at all levels of the life of the Church and to itself engage in this process of listening in order to discover the voice of the Living God

Therefore, I repeat the invitation of the *Preparatory Document*: "Let the pastors not be afraid to listen to the flock entrusted to them" (DP 14): it will not be difficult for you to initiate the consultation, since your laity is formed and willing to participate. In fact, your Church has already incorporated synodal structures in line with the ecclesiological principles of Vatican II (parish pastoral and financial councils, councils of priests and diocesan pastoral councils) and as Archbishop José Gomez, your dear President, has recently told me during a fraternal meeting in Rome, the American Church has enormously benefitted from the five nationwide experiences of the *Encuentro*. A primary outcome of the *Encuentro* process is to discern pastoral practices and priorities in order to improve the quality of ministry among Hispanic/Latino Catholics, under the leadership of the U.S. Bishops. Additionally the *V Encuentro* has provided many dioceses with synod structures that can contribute to the present synodal process.

Do not be afraid to tell us frankly what you have gathered from listening to your people about what the Spirit is saying to the Church: to your Church and to the whole Church. For our part, as Secretariat of the Synod, we will be happy if we can help and support you in the different phases of the synodal process.