



SECRETARIA GENERALIS  
SYNODI

**MEETING OF THE HEADS  
OF THE CONTINENTAL BODIES  
OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH**

**23-25 June 2026**

**Opening Address of Card. Mario Grech**

(23 June 2026)

For almost five years we have reflected on and worked on synodality. Much has been accomplished, and much has matured in the heart of the Church. Indeed, never before has a synodal process generated such momentum, such *gravitas*. One need only look at what has taken place during these years: the remarkable number of synodal teams established in local Churches; the reports we receive during *ad Limina* Visits, where bishops speak candidly about the steps taken and the challenges encountered; the many schools of synodality that have emerged to support formation; the symposia, conferences, and processes of listening and discernment that have involved thousands of faithful. I am convinced that during this gathering we too will hear much more, and that the exchange of experiences will continue to deepen our shared understanding of the journey that the Spirit is bringing about in the Church.

All of this is profoundly encouraging. It is a sign that the Spirit is moving the Church, educating her in a new style of being, helping her rediscover her deepest identity: to be the People of God on pilgrimage, not a collection of individuals, but a communal subject that discerns, prays, listens, and allows itself to be converted.

And yet – if I may speak frankly – I will be truly satisfied only when I see the emergence of a broad missionary movement, a renewed impulse that leads the Church to go forth, to take risks, to draw near to others, and to bear witness to the Gospel with freedom and creativity. For, as has been repeated many times, the ultimate purpose of this synodal conversion is not merely to improve internal processes or to make our structures more participatory. The goal is far greater, far more decisive:

“The Church exists to bear witness in the world to the most decisive moment in history: the Resurrection of Jesus” (*Final Document* [FD]14).

If synodality does not lead to a renewed missionary outreach, if it does not set hearts ablaze and move people to action, if it does not give rise to communities that proclaim Christ with joy and parrhesia, then it risks remaining incomplete. The true test of the synodal journey will come when we see communities that allow themselves to be sent forth, that set out on the road, that not only speak about hope but embody it.

My hope is that the phase we are currently living – a delicate and decisive phase of reception and implementation – will truly enable the whole Church to embrace with conviction this missionary movement that the Spirit is stirring up. Such a movement, if it is to be authentic and fruitful, can only take the form of a proclamation made together, a proclamation born of communion.

Mission, in fact, is never the isolated task of a few “specialists”; it is the very breath of the People of God journeying through history. It is when the holy People of God recognize themselves as genuine protagonists – not spectators, not passive recipients, but living and active subjects – that mission recovers its original vitality.

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Church has been undergoing – slowly yet decisively – a transition that Christoph Theobald describes as the passage from the “colonial standardization of the Latin Church” to its “geographical and cultural differentiation.” It is a long process, requiring a conversion of perspective and ecclesial maturity, but one that increasingly appears to be a necessary condition for mission.

The *Final Document* strongly reaffirms this direction: “Synodal renewal fosters an appreciation of local contexts as the place where the universal call from God manifests and fulfils itself. It is a call to be part of God’s People, to participate in that Reign of God, which is “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (*Rom* 14:17). In this way, different cultures are enabled to grasp the unity that underlies their plurality and become open to the prospect of an exchange of gifts. “The unity of the Church is not uniformity, but an organic blending of legitimate diversities” (NMI 46). There is a variety of ways in which the message of salvation is expressed. This helps avoid reducing this message to a single understanding of the life of the Church and of the theological, liturgical, pastoral and disciplinary forms it takes” (FD 39).

These varieties – whether theological, liturgical, pastoral, or disciplinary – are not a threat to unity but one of its vital conditions. They prevent ecclesial life from being reduced to a single form, a single sensibility, or a single cultural model.

Synodality, in this sense, is not merely an organizational method. It is the path through which the Church learns to recognize, welcome, and integrate plurality as a gift of the Spirit. A synodal Church is a Church that does not fear difference, because she knows that unity is born not from homogenization but from communion. As we read in the *Final Document*: “The ministry of the successor of Peter “safeguards legitimate differences while taking care that what is particular not only does no harm to unity but rather is conducive to it” (*ibid.*, cf. AG 22)” (FD 37).

From the beginning of his pontificate, Pope Francis proposed the image of the polyhedron as an ecclesial icon. He observed that pastoral ministry should not take the sphere as its model, where every point is equidistant from the centre and differences dissolve into an abstract uniformity, but rather the polyhedron, “which reflects the convergence of all its parts, each of which preserves its distinctiveness” (*Evangelii gaudium*, 236). The Gospel – he explained – becomes incarnate precisely in this way: not by erasing differences but by harmonizing them, allowing its richness to resonate

differently in people's lives, like a single melody expressed through different tones. Catholicity is not monochromatic but symphonic (cf. *Message*, 24.11.2023).

This vision has recently been reaffirmed in the encyclical of Pope Leo XIV, who takes up and develops this polyhedral perspective. Although speaking primarily about the Church's social doctrine, his insight can be fruitfully applied to synodal processes as well, since it touches upon the very way in which the Church understands, communicates, and lives the truth in history. "What matters most is not occupying positions of power or defending cultural strongholds, but initiating good processes and enabling them to mature. In this way, the truth of the Gospel is not imposed from above, but grows over time within the concrete interweaving of lives, communities and cultures. This is not a truth that fears diversity, but instead welcomes and guides it. It does not eliminate conflicts, but transforms them, reuniting that which history tends to scatter. (MH 25)"

The image of the polyhedron, embraced by both Pontiffs, thus becomes a genuine ecclesiological icon: the one truth of the Gospel is reflected from many angles, without losing its unity, while being enriched by the diversity of cultures, experiences, and charisms.

Applied to synodality, this logic becomes especially eloquent. The synodal journey is not aimed at occupying institutional spaces or redefining balances of power, but at generating dynamics of listening, discernment, and co-responsibility that, over time, transform the Church from within. It is a process that does not fear diversity but welcomes it as a place where the truth of the Gospel can resonate in new and unexpected ways.

In this context, we cannot forget the ecumenical dimension of our dialogue and exchange among the Churches. Synodality concerns not only the way in which the Catholic Church journeys within herself, but also the way she relates to other disciples of Christ. Every time we value contexts, cultures, differences, and the relationships among them – as the *Final Document* invites us to do – we enter into a profoundly ecumenical logic: we acknowledge that the Spirit works beyond our own boundaries, that the truth of the Gospel resonates in many forms, and that communion is always greater than our particular affiliations.

The *Final Document*, while emphasizing the importance of the plurality of contexts and the exchange of gifts, strongly reaffirms "the commitment of the Catholic Church to continue and intensify the ecumenical journey with other Christians by virtue of our common Baptism and in response to the call to live together the communion and unity among disciples for which Christ prayed at the Last Supper (cf. *Jn* 17:20-26)" (FD 40).

Our coming together during these days is like a mirror – or better, a living icon – of that *communio Ecclesiarum* rediscovered by the Second Vatican Council and which we are now called to help mature. Each grouping of Churches, drawn from every continent, is present here with its own spiritual riches, and this can only fill us with gratitude. Our differences are not an obstacle but a gift: they are proof that the Gospel

continues to take flesh in different ways, generating new forms of holiness, service, and pastoral creativity. It is as though, for a few days, the polyhedron of the universal Church becomes visible in miniature: many faces, one light.

Through Pope Francis and Pope Leo, the Holy Spirit has entrusted us with a common project: the synodal and missionary conversion of the Church. Or, more profoundly still, in this time of epochal change we have been called to help the Church rediscover her original identity: that of a People gathered, guided, and sent forth by the Spirit, capable of journeying together and proclaiming the Gospel together.

On the first day, we will share experiences, difficulties, and open questions from our various ecclesial contexts. It will be a genuine exchange of gifts, in which each offers what he has and receives what he lacks. In this mutual movement, the Church recognizes herself for what she truly is: a communion of Churches that journey together, listen to one another, support one another, and enlighten one another. As we engage in this sharing, let us also seek to fill one another's sails with fresh wind, so that the boat may move forward with greater determination. We will also seek to identify more clearly the tasks of accompaniment, coordination, and support entrusted to the continental bodies and their teams, in collaboration with our Secretariat.

On the second day, we will seek to understand how best to celebrate the continental assemblies, so that they may become generative spaces, capable of bringing forth the voice of the local Churches, fostering unity in diversity, and orienting the journey toward the Ecclesial Assembly of 2028.

Finally, at the conclusion of our meeting, we will have the grace of meeting the Holy Father. We truly feel the need for Peter's word, a word that not only confirms us in the faith, but sustains and guides us along the path we are travelling. The voice of the Successor of Peter reminds us of our unity, safeguards us in communion, and helps us never to lose sight of the missionary horizon.

I wish to thank you for your presence, but above all for your dedication to the mission. Each one of you carries both the burden and the beauty of your service; each brings stories, struggles, insights, and hopes. It is thanks to this daily fidelity that the synodal journey can continue to advance and that the Church can increasingly rediscover her evangelical form.