



The Holy See

***ADDRESS OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS
FOR THE CONCLUSION OF THE THIRD EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS***

*Synod Hall
Saturday, 18 October 2014*

Dear Eminences, Beatitudes, Excellencies, Brothers and Sisters,

With a heart full of appreciation and gratitude I want to thank, along with you, the Lord who has accompanied and guided us in the past days, with the light of the Holy Spirit.

From the heart I thank Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, Secretary General of the Synod, Bishop Fabio Fabene, under-secretary, and with them I thank the Relators, Cardinal Peter Erdo, who has worked so much in these days of family mourning, and the Special Secretary Bishop Bruno Forte, the three President delegates, the transcribers, the consultants, the translators and the unknown workers, all those who have worked with true fidelity and total dedication behind the scenes and without rest. Thank you so much from the heart.

I thank all of you as well, dear Synod fathers, Fraternal Delegates, Auditors, and Assessors, for your active and fruitful participation. I will keep you in prayer asking the Lord to reward you with the abundance of His gifts of grace!

I can happily say that – with a spirit of collegiality and of synodality – we have truly lived the experience of “Synod,” a path of solidarity, a “journey together.”

And it has been “a journey” – and like every journey there were moments of running fast, as if wanting to conquer time and reach the goal as soon as possible; other moments of fatigue, as if

wanting to say “enough”; other moments of enthusiasm and ardour. There were moments of profound consolation listening to the testimony of true pastors, who wisely carry in their hearts the joys and the tears of their faithful people. Moments of consolation and grace and comfort hearing the testimonies of the families who have participated in the Synod and have shared with us the beauty and the joy of their married life. A journey where the stronger feel compelled to help the less strong, where the more experienced are led to serve others, even through confrontations. And since it is a journey of human beings, with the consolations there were also moments of desolation, of tensions and temptations, of which a few possibilities could be mentioned:

- One, a temptation to hostile inflexibility, that is, wanting to close oneself within the written word, (the letter) and not allowing oneself to be surprised by God, by the God of surprises, (the spirit); within the law, within the certitude of what we know and not of what we still need to learn and to achieve. From the time of Christ, it is the temptation of the zealous, of the scrupulous, of the solicitous and of the so-called – today – “traditionalists” and also of the intellectuals.
- The temptation to a destructive tendency to goodness [it. *buonismo*], that in the name of a deceptive mercy binds the wounds without first curing them and treating them; that treats the symptoms and not the causes and the roots. It is the temptation of the “do-gooders,” of the fearful, and also of the so-called “progressives and liberals.”
- The temptation to transform stones into bread to break the long, heavy, and painful fast (cf. Lk 4:1-4); and also to transform the bread into a stone and cast it against the sinners, the weak, and the sick (cf. Jn 8:7), that is, to transform it into unbearable burdens (Lk 11:46).
- The temptation to come down off the Cross, to please the people, and not stay there, in order to fulfil the will of the Father; to bow down to a worldly spirit instead of purifying it and bending it to the Spirit of God.
- The temptation to neglect the “*depositum fidei*” [the deposit of faith], not thinking of themselves as guardians but as owners or masters [of it]; or, on the other hand, the temptation to neglect reality, making use of meticulous language and a language of smoothing to say so many things and to say nothing! They call them “byzantinisms,” I think, these things...

Dear brothers and sisters, the temptations must not frighten or disconcert us, or even discourage us, because no disciple is greater than his master; so if Jesus Himself was tempted – and even called Beelzebul (cf. Mt 12:24) – His disciples should not expect better treatment.

Personally I would be very worried and saddened if it were not for these temptations and these animated discussions; this movement of the spirits, as St Ignatius called it (Spiritual Exercises, 6), if all were in a state of agreement, or silent in a false and quietist peace. Instead, I have seen and I have heard – with joy and appreciation – speeches and interventions full of faith, of pastoral and

doctrinal zeal, of wisdom, of frankness and of courage: and of *parresia*. And I have felt that what was set before our eyes was the good of the Church, of families, and the “supreme law,” the “good of souls” (cf. Can. 1752). And this always – we have said it here, in the Hall – without ever putting into question the fundamental truths of the Sacrament of marriage: the indissolubility, the unity, the faithfulness, the fruitfulness, that openness to life (cf. Cann. 1055, 1056; and *Gaudium et spes*, 48).

And this is the Church, the vineyard of the Lord, the fertile Mother and the caring Teacher, who is not afraid to roll up her sleeves to pour oil and wine on people’s wound; who doesn’t see humanity as a house of glass to judge or categorize people. This is the Church, One, Holy, Catholic, Apostolic and composed of sinners, needful of God’s mercy. This is the Church, the true bride of Christ, who seeks to be faithful to her spouse and to her doctrine. It is the Church that is not afraid to eat and drink with prostitutes and publicans. The Church that has the doors wide open to receive the needy, the penitent, and not only the just or those who believe they are perfect! The Church that is not ashamed of the fallen brother and pretends not to see him, but on the contrary feels involved and almost obliged to lift him up and to encourage him to take up the journey again and accompany him toward a definitive encounter with her Spouse, in the heavenly Jerusalem.

This is the Church, our Mother! And when the Church, in the variety of her charisms, expresses herself in communion, she cannot err: it is the beauty and the strength of the *sensus fidei*, of that supernatural sense of the faith which is bestowed by the Holy Spirit so that, together, we can all enter into the heart of the Gospel and learn to follow Jesus in our life. And this should never be seen as a source of confusion and discord.

Many commentators, or people who talk, have imagined that they see a disputatious Church where one part is against the other, doubting even the Holy Spirit, the true promoter and guarantor of the unity and harmony of the Church – the Holy Spirit who throughout history has always guided the barque, through her Ministers, even when the sea was rough and choppy, and the ministers unfaithful and sinners.

And, as I have dared to tell you, [as] I told you from the beginning of the Synod, it was necessary to live through all this with tranquillity, and with interior peace, so that the Synod would take place *cum Petro* and *sub Petro* (with Peter and under Peter), and the presence of the Pope is the guarantee of it all.

We will speak a little bit about the Pope, now, in relation to the Bishops [laughing]. So, the duty of the Pope is that of guaranteeing the unity of the Church; it is that of reminding the faithful of their duty to faithfully follow the Gospel of Christ; it is that of reminding the pastors that their first duty is to nourish the flock – to nourish the flock – that the Lord has entrusted to them, and to seek to welcome – with fatherly care and mercy, and without false fears – the lost sheep. I made a mistake here. I said welcome: [rather] to go out and find them.

His duty is to remind everyone that authority in the Church is a service, as Pope [Benedict XVI](#) clearly explained, with words I cite verbatim: “The Church is called and commits herself to exercise this kind of authority which is service and exercises it not in her own name, but in the name of Jesus Christ... through the Pastors of the Church, in fact: it is he who guides, protects and corrects them, because he loves them deeply. But the Lord Jesus, the supreme Shepherd of our souls, has willed that the Apostolic College, today the Bishops, in communion with the Successor of Peter... to participate in his mission of taking care of God's People, of educating them in the faith and of guiding, inspiring and sustaining the Christian community, or, as the Council puts it, ‘to see to it... that each member of the faithful shall be led in the Holy Spirit to the full development of his own vocation in accordance with Gospel preaching, and to sincere and active charity’ and to exercise that liberty with which Christ has set us free (cf. [Presbyterorum Ordinis](#), 6)... and it is through us,” Pope Benedict continues, “that the Lord reaches souls, instructs, guards and guides them. St Augustine, in his Commentary on the Gospel of St John, says: ‘let it therefore be a commitment of love to feed the flock of the Lord’ (cf. 123, 5); this is the supreme rule of conduct for the ministers of God, an unconditional love, like that of the Good Shepherd, full of joy, given to all, attentive to those close to us and solicitous for those who are distant (cf. St Augustine, Discourse 340, 1; Discourse 46, 15), gentle towards the weakest, the little ones, the simple, the sinners, to manifest the infinite mercy of God with the reassuring words of hope (cf. *ibid.*, Epistle, 95, 1).”

So, the Church is Christ's – she is His bride – and all the bishops, in communion with the Successor of Peter, have the task and the duty of guarding her and serving her, not as masters but as servants. The Pope, in this context, is not the supreme lord but rather the supreme servant – the “servant of the servants of God”; the guarantor of the obedience and the conformity of the Church to the will of God, to the Gospel of Christ, and to the Tradition of the Church, putting aside every personal whim, despite being – by the will of Christ Himself – the “supreme Pastor and Teacher of all the faithful” (Can. 749) and despite enjoying “supreme, full, immediate, and universal ordinary power in the Church” (cf. Cann. 331-334).

Dear brothers and sisters, now we still have one year to mature, with true spiritual discernment, the proposed ideas and to find concrete solutions to so many difficulties and innumerable challenges that families must confront; to give answers to the many discouragements that surround and suffocate families.

One year to work on the “Synodal Relatio” which is the faithful and clear summary of everything that has been said and discussed in this hall and in the small groups. It is presented to the Episcopal Conferences as “lineamenta” [guidelines].

May the Lord accompany us, and guide us in this journey for the glory of His Name, with the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and of Saint Joseph. And please, do not forget to pray for me! Thank you!

[The hymn Te Deum was sung, and Benediction given.]

Thank you, and rest well, eh?

[Vatican Radio's provisional translation]

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