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Presentation by His Eminence Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, S.J.

Reflection by Sr. M. Ignazia Angelini, osb

At 16.15 this afternoon, in the presence of the Holy Father Francis, in the Paul VI Hall in the Vatican, the 1st General Congregation of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, on the theme “For a synodal Church: communion, participation and mission” (4 to 29 October 2023) began.

The following is the presentation by His Eminence Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, S.J., archbishop of Luxembourg, general rapporteur, and the reflection by Sr. M. Ignazia Angelini, osb:

Presentation by His Eminence Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, S.J.

For a Synodal Church. An integral experience

Introduction to Module 1

Two speeches in a row from the same person seem a bit like penance... I will therefore try to be brief, but I am convinced that an introduction to the first module of our work, which we are starting now and which will keep us busy until Saturday morning, can be useful.

This module is designed first and foremost to allow us to “warm up our engines,” to live and to experience the methodology that we will also use in the following modules. Above all, it will hopefully help us to learn how to

make the alternation between *Circuli Minores* and General Congregations fruitful. I have already spoken about this in my previous speech, so I will not dwell on it now.

However, this first module also has another, far more important function. It must help us to make contact with synodality as a comprehensive vision, or rather, as the module title says, with the synodal Church as an integral experience. This is a step of fundamental importance for our work. In fact, the questions we will be dealing with in the subsequent modules need to be placed within a horizon, which constitutes the perspective of meaning and avoids the risk of getting lost in mere detail. At the same time, the concreteness of the questions that we will address later on frees the overview from the risk of abstraction and generalization. Thus, between the first and subsequent modules, there is a dynamic relationship that is of vital importance for the fruitfulness of our discernment. This is why the *Instrumentum laboris* reminds us that our commitment during the work of the Assembly is “to sustain a dynamic equilibrium between maintaining an overview, which characterizes the work outlined in section A, and the identification of practical steps to be taken in a concrete and timely fashion, work which is the focus of section B” (no. 16). So, on Saturday lunchtime we will conclude Module 1, but we will not simply send it to the archives: we will carry the formation and training it has given us into the next modules.

To begin this training, I propose that we exercise the faculty of memory, in its most profoundly spiritual sense. All of us here are members of the People of God, and as such for the past two years we have set out on the synodal path. This journey together has left traces in each of us: thoughts, emotions, feelings, intuitions, doubts, fears, enthusiasm... To undertake the work of the first module, each of us needs to reconnect with this heritage. I am well aware that, for many reasons, not all of us have been involved in the synodal process in the same way. For some of us – I am thinking in particular of those who worked to organize the Continental Assemblies, took part in them and contributed to the drafting of the Final Documents – the Synodal process has been probably the most important commitment of the year. Others experienced it in a more distant manner, trusting the synodal teams they had appointed. The latter will probably have fewer rich personal memories, but they can also refer to what they have heard from those who have participated more actively: other bishops of the same Bishops’ Conference, but above all priests, deacons, women and men religious, laymen and women with whom they have been in contact over the past two years. The memory to connect with is the collective memory of the People of God, not just the personal memory of each individual. This is why the many documents produced during the synodal process can also help: the synthesis of one’s own diocese, that of one’s own Bishops’ Conference, the *Working Document for the Continental Stage*, the Final Document of the Assembly of one’s own continent, and above all Section A of the *Instrumentum laboris*.

It is this enormous wealth that the Worksheet you received in Sacrofano tries to summarize on the first page, which serves to introduce the question for discernment. I want to take it up here because during the work of the next few days it is essential that we have in mind that our goal is to formulate an answer to this question:

Starting from the journey of the local Churches to which we each belong and from the contents of the Instrumentum laboris, which distinctive signs of a synodal Church emerge with greater clarity and which deserve greater recognition or should be particularly highlighted or deepened?

This question clearly shows us what to pay attention to when each one digs into his or her own memory of the synod process, and especially when we share the fruits of this work tomorrow. Let us allow the points on which we feel there is great clarity to emerge, but let us not overlook those where we feel there is still work to be done, where there is a mixture of light and shade, without fear of pointing out the reasons for uncertainty or doubt.

Tomorrow we will spend the whole day working in the *Circuli Minores*, applying the method of conversation in the Spirit. I would like to recall the succinct description of this method given in n. 37 of the *Instrumentum laboris*: “conversation in the Spirit can be described as a shared prayer with a view to communal discernment for which participants prepare themselves by personal reflection and meditation. They give each other the gift of a meditated word nourished by prayer, not an opinion improvised on the spot.” For our work to be fruitful, for our communal discernment to proceed, tomorrow we must arrive prepared.

In the morning, in the *Circuli Minores* we will begin with a moment of mutual listening: each person will have four

minutes to communicate what is most important to him or her. It will be possible to deliver the text of your speech, preferably in electronic format, to the Secretariat, so that it will enter into the Assembly materials. Four minutes is a short time, and I am sure each of us would have enough to share to fill a much longer slot. Therefore, each of us is invited to choose what seems most important and most meaningful, what they feel emerges most strongly from their memory. I invite everyone – if you have not already done so – to carve out some time for reflection and prayer this evening, or tomorrow morning for those who get up early, so as to focus on what they want to communicate in their opening intervention in the group. The time each person invests in preparation will be an important contribution to the quality of our common work.

In view of this preparation work, let me suggest a Gospel passage: the account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35). We are all familiar with this passage, but we need to meditate on it again. The two disciples walk in silence, their eyes downcast. Then, when Jesus approaches, his presence and his questions open up a space for speaking and listening. They thus begin to tell, that is, they exercise their memory, and it is a tale of hope and enthusiasm. But then disillusionment, frustration, anger, and fear also emerge. They are not afraid to entrust all this to the mysterious wayfarer, and so they discover that listening to his Word dissolves their heaviness and transforms their desolation into a consolation that grows. No. 36 of the *Instrumentum laboris*, which refers to this very passage, comments: “conversation in the Spirit builds communion and brings missionary dynamism. The two, in fact, return to the community they had left to share the Easter proclamation that the Lord is risen.” I do not know if we will have many moments of desolation in our walking together, but I am confident that by the work of the Holy Spirit, consolation will enter our hearts, which is the condition for undertaking a good discernment. I believe that returning to reflect, even briefly, on this passage from the Gospel of Luke can help us to enter into tomorrow’s work with the right dispositions.

This concludes my introduction. After few minutes of silence, I now gladly leave the floor to Mother Ignazia Angelini. Tomorrow, in the *Circuli Minores*, we will have to walk together. We therefore ask her to nourish our Spirit in view of that commitment, and I know that she will do so drawing on the profound experience of the great saint we are celebrating today. Finally, two testimonies will help us get in touch with the synodal memory of the People of God.

Reflection by Sr. M. Ignazia Angelini, osb

We have enthroned the Gospel. Every new beginning, the light and the strength to live it, springs from the Gospel. One cannot begin but from the Gospel.

“Yes, Father!”. This jubilant cry of Jesus, at the heart of today’s Gospel (Lk 10:21-22), at the heart of the Eucharist, is the grace that summons us here now as His Church, a grace that precedes, converts and regenerates every step and conversation, all the intense work that has led us up to here. It opens the way, it sets the pace to go further.

The “yes” of the Son, which is there from the beginning (Jn 1:1,2:18), marks his coming into the world (Heb 10:5) – it was pronounced “in that precise moment”, and today, here, confirmed in prayer, in the jubilation of the Spirit. A “yes” provoked in Jesus, the beloved Son, by the astonishing perception of the Father’s *eudokia*: God does not allow himself to be hindered by the refusals of the powerful and the intelligent, he reveals his mystery to the little ones.

Let us welcome this “yes” of the Lord Jesus in fear and great joy at the heart of this beginning: “In him it is always Yes” (2 Cor 1:19), to the very end. Thus, today, in the “yes” of his Son, Jesus, God once again reveals himself, acts in the Church, in history. Thus, his Spirit moves - tenacious, generative - in the intricate paths of human communication, in the tangle of the events of history, in the suffering of the poor, in the restlessness of those who seek, in the openness of the little ones.

Even today: Jesus’ “Yes, Father!”, realized in the Eucharist, gathers us together, and is the hidden force of this

convocation, which comes from on high: "Come to me, all of you...!"

A mysterious intertwining of controversial sentiments seems to animate Jesus' "yes" at a precise moment in His history; we know this from the Gospel narrative.

Jesus had just voiced a heartfelt lament over the unbelieving obtuseness of the cities by the lake - but here he breaks free from all resentful disappointment, and blesses. This is God's justice, the new justice.

Jesus gives thanks, He blesses: and with his very gentle authority He teaches us the art of blessing, which could be the *cantus firmus*, the recitation chord of this Assembly. "To bless at all times" (*Ps* 34:2: see s. resp.). Jesus, in a context that surrounds Him and indeed constraints Him, that despises and rejects the announcement of the Kingdom, blesses: and thus exorcises, transfigures the doubt of the forerunner, and the rejection of the cities of the lake, his chosen land (*Mt* 11:1-24). The great, authoritative, most gentle revelation of the Son summons us. Which as such reverberates on our paths, opens them wide: also and precisely, today, to the synodal path.

"To the little ones you have revealed... Come!". The little ones, that is the dynamic force of synodality, to be rediscovered for us, in us, a generation stressed and dispersed in conversations, sometimes truly exhausting. Saint Francis is still for us today a luminous, eloquent witness of smallness, of the blessed minority generated by the summons of the Son. Let us not take his message of rebuilding the Church for granted.

"Yes, Father!": from Jesus, to Francis. From wonder to wonder. To noi. Are we able to welcome it and let ourselves be summoned?

Intolerant of a quarrelsome society, the young Francis, God's jester, bold in his passion for Our Lady Poverty, mistaken for a heretic and persecuted, pursues perfect joy in the footsteps of Jesus. The difference between him and heretics or divisive protesters is limpid, disarming: humble love finds surprising, very simple language in him, who had understood God's call to become *quendam pazzus*. But what madness?

Illuminated by a dream about his mission to convene a new ecclesial reality, Francis likened himself to a hen in caring for his brothers: a tiny black hen, too small to keep its offspring under her wings, and therefore vitally attached to the great church. And even in the hour in which the disfigurement of his ideals loomed large - dispossessed of his projects that he had boldly conceived, his passion for the highest poverty - Francis remained faithful to that meek and humble one who had summoned him in the name of "here lies perfect joy". And today Francis opens, gives way to this lofty assembly.

In his Seventh Admonition Francis recalled the Apostle with words of fire: "The written code kills, but the Spirit gives life" (*2 Cor* 3:6). "Those have died by the letter who desire to know only the words, so as to be esteemed as wiser among others and be able to acquire great riches to be given to relatives and friends. And those religious have died by the letter, who do not want to follow the spirit of Divine, but rather desire only to know the words and to explain them to others. And those have been vivified by the Divine Letter, who do not attribute every letter, which they know and desire to know, to the body, but in word and example attribute them to the Lord God Most High, of whom every good belongs". Restoring the word: this is the soul of spiritual conversion.

I wish to the the participants the spirit of this minority revealed by Jesus and well incarnated by Francis. As Father Ghislain Lafont commented: "This smallness is not infantilism. It is the still fresh and tender root of our deepest being. It is a kind of unconditional readiness to where we can go, which allows us to accept without calculation what happens, to take everything 'willingly. We are then placed on the path of wisdom, of the vision of God in human vicissitudes, of what Jesus, who knows the Father, wants to reveal to us. The result is a respectful closeness to all human beings, beginning with the closest" - which goes as far as the sign of meekness - making room for the other, creating space for him to come to himself.

"Yes, Father". ... "Adsumus!" - the opening prayer, does it not repropose this position? It is a matter of consenting - but not through clenched teeth because there is no alternative - but rather by blessing and giving

thanks, to a God who is radically "other" in the methods of His saving action, which reveal a blessing, a "good that pleases". The "Here I am!" of Abraham, of Moses, of Isaiah, of Mary, resonate in the "yes" of Jesus and are clearly reflected in Francis.

We are called to listen - through, and beyond, the conversation between us - to the beloved Son who summons us to *anapausis* as He knows how to give it, to the rest of a meek and humble acceptance of reality.

May these days that are now being inaugurated be fruitful - of a Universal Assembly! - open to the Grace of that convocation: "Come to me, all of you!". Sensitive to the perfect gladness of the Son who blesses, and to the perfect gladness of the little ones who receive revelation.

The fullness of joy is entrusted to the hands and hearts of those who are weary and oppressed, who seek rest and relief in the meekness and humility of Christ, bearing His gentle yoke and light burden upon them. But only to those who make room for the spirit of blessing and thanksgiving will it be given to recognize God's action in history, and to understand the language of others, to see God at work in the world, because God "is glorified by the humble" (*Sir* 3:20), He makes His will known to them (cf. *Ps* 25:14).
