

"Don't stand aside, be part of it".

Months after the conclusion of the 2nd Session of the *16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops "For a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission"*, everything that was experienced has been ruminating and, above all, the most important images remain, what remains, beyond the anecdotal or what is forgotten.

The perspective of time and space allows us to give thanks to God, to the Church, to all those who in one way or another have allowed me to participate in this *Synod on synodality* (to put it simply): the trust of my brother bishops of the Argentine Episcopal Conference, which was responsible for choosing some of the "Synod Fathers", and of Pope Francis, who was responsible for confirming that choice.

The possibility of contemplating the work of the Holy Spirit, defined in some way by St. Basil the Great as harmony itself, calms the soul, leaving behind the nervousness of each personal intervention and of listening to other members of the synod, which could have been more cautious at the beginning and was much more contemplative afterwards. Thank God

If the 2023 Assembly put its emphasis on what we usually call the *status quaestionis*, the second session brought a greater confidence, openness of mind and heart to give us a, let's say, "resolution path" with very concrete indications that can be a guide for the mission of the Churches, in the different continents, in the different contexts.

The experts, whether or not they participated in the two Sessions, gave, and continue to give, very profound analyses of the Outcome Document, because this - in a sense - has only just begun

It has happened in a way as it happens in the General Chapters which in the life of the friars of the Order of Preachers meet every three years (although the periodicity has changed throughout the more than 800 years of the confirmation of the Order). At the beginning of each one of them, listening to the first interventions (in commissions or plenary meetings), we all ask ourselves where will the reflection go, what will be the conclusions on so many and so varied topics? Sometimes there are even friars who whisper: "Where will we end up? Some of us certainly wonder if anything will come out of the apparent disorder of proposals, discussions, points of view, etc.!

It cannot be otherwise. Everything that has to do with the life of the Order throughout the world is a matter of total reflection, of total discernment, and finally of every definition, legislation in the broadest and most analogous sense of our way of being and saying: constitutions, ordinations, recommendations, admonitions, suggestions, invitations, etc.

In each Chapter, especially the "Generals" (which certainly demands and expresses this "walking together" proper to synodality), we are many, all very different, coming from very different parts of the world!... What can we say again without breaking the very unity or "unanimity" of the Order in its tradition and permanent newness (the unanimity proper to the Word: **being of one heart and one soul towards God**)?

Little by little, in the patient dialogue, in the presentation of the conclusions, the necessary pruning, correction or amendment of texts, the final approval, we discover again that - indeed - the **Holy Spirit is harmony!** We also reconfirm the necessary consolation, St. Dominic's promise to his friars who were mourning his imminent departure: he would be more useful to them when he died than he was in life... and so it is!

Let me use the example we are all familiar with from our local, provincial and general or universal way of life to contemplate, try to understand and ruminate on what we experience in the Paul VI Hall, although from the year 2021 onwards we have already been able to experience it in various ways at the level of the whole Church.

I have not left the Order, but I think the first "postcard from the soul" that I would like to highlight - after the way of being and governing the Order - is the experience of listening to one of our brothers and his contribution to the "Synod of Synodality". It is not mere chance, nor the result of a lottery, nor do I think it is the fruit of compromises or parlour pacts, to witness the presence and preaching (he was a "Spiritual Assistant" or something like that and not a "Synodal Father", technically speaking). I am referring to our beloved Bro Timothy Radcliffe, OP.

His presence and preaching, I repeat, can manifest all the deepest rhythms of our life and mission: contemplating (listening to God and the brothers; seeing them and presenting them to God; speaking to Him about the men and women of our time) and giving to others the fruit of what we contemplate (preaching, speaking to the brothers about God; speaking to them about what God is working in them).

Months after the conclusion of the second session (Saturday 26 October 2024), I believe that both in the retreats prior to both sessions (2023 and 2024) and in his

reflections during the sessions, without participating directly in some of the 37 working tables, his words have indicated key clues to understanding what we have in our hands and hearts today: the Conclusions of 2023 and the Final Document of 2024.

I believe that the titles of each "chapter" of the Final Document and the very references to the apparitions of the Risen Jesus (the weaving of his words), rescue the essence of that preaching. The document - let us say - has been inspired in some way by the rhythm of that preaching, it has received in an incisive way the intuitions that our brother has been unpacking, like a seed in a soil that I believe, thanks to the work of the first session (2023), appeared more fertile in the second (2024).

With this sort of prologue, I can try to scribble some answers to the questions proposed, without claiming to be exhaustive! On the contrary, the capitular experience of the Order and that of this Synod allow me to stammer out something that may be useful to whoever has the patience to read or listen to me.

I keep remembering (I was still living in Rome, in Santa Sabina) the speech of Pope Benedict XVI - Christmas greeting to the Roman Curia - on 22 December 2005. The date is not difficult to remember: the 789th anniversary of the confirmation of the Order of Preachers by Pope Honorius III. Among the themes that the Pope addressed to his Curia, he underlined that of the "hermeneutics of the Second Vatican Council on the 40th anniversary of its solemn closure (8 December 1965)".

I refer specifically to what he defined as "the hermeneutics of reform in continuity and not in rupture". It is about renewal within the continuity of the one subject-Church, which the Lord has given us; a subject that grows in time and develops, but always remaining the same, the one subject of the people of God on the way.

For many, in fact, the Council meant a "break" with what had gone before. Because it was a break with the previous tradition. Of course, some rejoiced precisely because of this, for everything was new everywhere and this total break was long awaited, flattering and necessary; others, on the contrary, wept for the times gone by and condemned the Council for having caused this break.

Meanwhile, the post-conciliar magisterium continued with patience and hope, helping the reflection and real assumption of the profound conciliar, i.e. synodal, reflection.

I believe that these lamentations, very briefly quoted above, still linger on. Suffice it, to express myself better, to quote the Exhortation *Gaudete in Domino* of Saint

Paul VI (9 May 1975, Holy Year!). I am thinking, as an example, of n. 74: *May our restless children of certain groups therefore reject the excesses of systematic and annihilating criticism! Without having to depart from a realistic vision, may Christian communities become places of upright and serene trust, where all their members are resolutely trained to discern the positive aspects of people and events. "Charity does not rejoice in injustice, but rejoices in truth. It excuses everything. It always believes. It always hopes. It endures all things" (1 Cor 13:6-7)*

How is the bond of unity to be safeguarded in a Church that is synodal and on the way? Let me once again quote St. Paul VI, in his first encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* (n. 38). It was in a way the "programme" of his pontificate, as was the *Redemptor hominis* of St. John Paul II (1979) or the Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii gaudium* of Pope Francis (2013), for each of the two respectively.

Dialogue is therefore a way of exercising the apostolic mission; it is an art of spiritual communication. Its characteristics are as follows:

1) First of all, **clarity**: *dialogue presupposes and demands intelligibility, it is an exchange of thought, it is an invitation to the exercise of man's higher faculties; this title alone would suffice to classify it among the best phenomena of human activity and culture, and this initial requirement is enough to stimulate our apostolic diligence to review all the forms of our language, to see if it is comprehensible, if it is popular, if it is select.*

2) Another character is **affability**, which Christ exhorted us to learn from Himself: *Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart (Mt 11:29); dialogue is not proud, it is not hurtful, it is not offensive. Its authority is intrinsic in the truth it expounds, in the charity it spreads, in the example it proposes; it is not a command or an imposition. He is peaceful, he avoids violence, he is patient, he is generous.*

3) **Trust**, both in the value of one's own word and in the willingness to accept it on the part of the interlocutor; *it promotes familiarity and friendship; it binds the spirits together in a mutual adherence to a Good, which excludes all egoistic ends.*

4) Finally, **pedagogical prudence**, which takes into account the psychological and moral conditions of the listener (cf. Mt 7, 6): *if he is a child, if he is a rude person, if he is not prepared, if he is distrustful, hostile, and makes an effort to know his sensitivity and to reasonably adapt and modify the forms of his presentation so as not to be annoying and incomprehensible to him.*

When dialogue is conducted in this way, the union of truth with charity, of intelligence with love, is realised.

Conversation in the Spirit, throughout the entire synodal process or journey, has been the method proposed for conducting this "dialogue" most fruitfully. I believe that only dialogue, with these same characteristics, is the most suitable way to safeguard the bond of unity in a synodal Church on the way. God himself has revealed himself through the "dialogue" of creation and salvation. Today he asks his people to continue on this path. Otherwise, rebellion would arise.

In the same year as the publication of *Gaudete in Domino*, Pope St. Paul VI gave the Church *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, something like the "Evangeliser's Letter or Guide" (published on December 8, 1975, the 10th anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council). Looking at reality as the Order does, that is, from joy or joy in the Lord, evangelisation is the clearest and most joyful expression of sharing that look. How do we do it? Let us read n.76:

We now consider the very person of the evangelisers. It has often been repeated in our time that this century thirsts for authenticity. Especially with regard to young people, it is said that they are horrified by the fictitious, by falsehoods, and that they are also strongly in favour of truth and transparency.

These "signs of the times" should be matched by a vigilant attitude on our part. Tacitly or loudly, but always forcefully, we are asked: Do you truly believe what you proclaim? Do you live what you believe? Do you really preach what you live? Today more than ever, the witness of life has become an essential condition for the real effectiveness of preaching. Without beating about the bush, we can say that to a certain extent we are responsible for the Gospel we proclaim.

Damian Byrne, OP (Master of the Order, 1983 - 1992), in his letter to the Order on the ministry of preaching. As Pope Montini asks all evangelisers, fray Damian questions the members of the Dominican Family on their primary contribution to the Church (the reason why St. Dominic embarked on his founding task). Contemplation and offering to others the fruit of our contemplation defines us in some way and characterises our life and mission. Our particular mode of government emphasises, at the same time and without absurd dialectics, the dignity of the person, his endowments, gifts and charisms and, without undermining this, a strong communitarian accent. Why? Because, as we read in the Book of Constitutions and Ordinations of the friars, and also in the Constitutions of the nuns of the Order, "**the good that is accepted by all is promoted with speed and ease**" (in the words of Blessed Humbert of Romans, in the *Opera de vita regulari*; Ed Berthier I, 72).

Dialogue with God and dialogue between brothers characterise and express this way of relating to one another, of linking ourselves. In these expressions we could embrace the whole content of the Final Document of the Synodal Assembly! This

is the key theme behind which many others have been developed, treated and discerned: **the conversion of relationships, of processes, of bonds?**

Is this not what we have learned from the joy of St. Dominic and the trust - shared joy - he had in his brothers to live with them and send them out to preach the Gospel?

We clearly learn this on the road (walking together) in the itinerancy that characterises us.

Bro Paul of Venice, one of the witnesses in the process of canonisation of St. Dominic (Process of Bologna, Witness VIII), tells that "Master Dominic" used to say to him and to others who were with him: "**Walk, let us think of our Saviour**". He also testifies that "wherever Dominic was, he always spoke of God or with God"; he confesses that "he never saw him angry, agitated or troubled, neither because of the fatigue of the journey, nor for any other reason, but **always cheerful in tribulations and patient in adversities**".

What I experienced at the Synod allowed me to breathe in and breathe out the way of being of the Order *in medio Ecclesiae*. Breathing in and breathing out are the two moments of breathing. Similarly, I could also say: it is necessary to be nourished by the Church and, at the same time, in the Church, and to offer her that breath of St. Dominic, the foundation and meaning of all that is Dominican!

In the last session, long and tedious if you like, voting one by one on all the paragraphs (numbers) of the Final Document, with the qualified majority required for each paragraph to "pass" (273 of the votes), having concluded this most important formality, Pope Francis announced that he would assume as his own all that was expressed and approved. That is to say: he would not write a "post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation" of his own authorship (cf. Final Document, 17th General Congregation, Pope's final greeting, Saturday 26 October 2024).

The sustained applause, I would say unanimous without fear, expressed not only the deep satisfaction of the duty completed, concluded..., but also, before the eyes of the world, at war and creating divisions, cracks and absurd confrontations, that the Pope was the first to take very seriously (seriousness comes from "serio" and not from "serie") what was worked on during four years of work at local (diocesan), national, continental and universal level. I will never again forget that moment. We were leaving with the satisfaction of having done our duty, yes, but with the immense joy of having been taken very seriously in what had been discerned and approved, made our own by the Successor of Peter. Perhaps it was there that we understood the deeper, synodal meaning of **ALL, SOME, ONE**.

Now, we have to implement it in the conversion of our particular churches, involving all God's holy and faithful people.

The Synod has given me a deeper understanding of the **CONVERSION** to which we have been invited. I would like to summarise it in a clear and simple way. But it is not a game, it is an exhortation to live "ecclesiality" seriously, as St. Dominic, St. Catherine and all the saints of the Order lived and preached it! Otherwise, we will be nothing but sad snipers. Therefore, my final exhortation to every reader of this testimony will be:

"DON'T STAND ASIDE, BE PART OF IT".

Fraternally in Christ, Mary and St. Dominic, let us walk together, pilgrims of Hope!

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