

For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission

Most of us are aware that Pope Francis inaugurated a two-year Synodal journey at St Peter's Basilica, Rome on Sunday, October 10, 2021. This process has three phases of consultations – diocesan, continental and universal –accompanied by prayer and discernment, culminating in the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in October 2023, in Rome. The theme of the Synod 2023 is - “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission”. We, in the Archdiocese of Bombay, inaugurated the Synodal process at the Cathedral of the Holy Name, Fort on Sunday, October 17, 2021, beginning with a solemn Eucharistic celebration, presided over by our Archbishop, Cardinal Oswald Gracias.

Speaking on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod by St Pope Paul VI, Pope Francis declared, “God wants the Church in the third millennium to walk the path of synodality.” He invites us to go back to the roots of the early Church. Pope Francis explained that we are all one family of the People of God by our Baptism. No one is to be excluded, but all are invited to be part of the Synod; not only those who are close to the Church, but especially those who are estranged from the Church's active life. Christ intended the Church to be inclusive. We need to listen to one another, especially to those in difficulty, those who are on the periphery, and even those who have left the Church. “Listening is more than hearing,” the Holy Father reminded us. We listen not just with the ears, but also with the heart, and hence, we are called to listen to **all** the members of the Church, even to those who have left the Roman Catholic Church. This was the one of the key elements of the Second Vatican Council, and it is one of the top priorities of the Synod 2021-2023.

The three dimensions of the Synod theme viz. communion, participation and mission are profoundly inter-related. They are indeed the key ingredients of a Synodal Church.

As the Church of God, we are called to a special kind of unity with God and with our brothers and sisters called “Communion”. This communion finds its deepest roots in the love and unity of the Trinity. Christ reconciles us to the Father and unites us with each other in the Holy Spirit. We are inspired by listening to the Word of God, through the living Tradition of the Church, and grounded in the *sensus fidei* that we share. What is truly noteworthy is that the communion that God builds in our midst is stronger than any divisions. Hence, we need to journey together.

Communion in the Body of Christ implies “participation”. Participation is based on the fact that all of us are called not to be idle spectators in the Church, but to be active participants. As People of God, we are called to serve one another through the gifts each of us has received from the Holy Spirit. Special attention must be given to those among us who may sometimes be excluded, including members of other Christian denominations and other religions; people who experience poverty and marginalization; people who live with a handicap, young people, women, etc.

True and genuine participation in the Body of Christ will automatically challenge us to go out on Mission – a mission of charity and evangelization. What should be known and understood is that mission is not carried out exclusively by priests, deacons and religious sisters and brothers, but by all the baptized. If our faith is alive, then we have no other option, but to share it by word and

example with the people we meet and encounter daily. We are on a mission to become Christ's presence in the world, "to enable the Church to better witness to the Gospel, especially to those who live on the spiritual, social, economic, political, geographical and existential peripheries of our world." As disciples of Jesus, we are leaven in the midst of humanity, so that the kingdom of God may rise across the entire world.

The Synod is a grace-filled time for each one of us. It is an opportunity for us to experience a new Pentecost. And hence we need to pray every day, so that we may discern what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church. May the Holy Spirit blow away all unwanted elements accumulated in the Church, and may He blow in to keep the faithful walking together in order to experience communion, find joy in participatory Church, and be fruitful in the mission of God.

Bishop Barthol Barretto

Questions for discussion:

1. A Synodal Church 'journeys together'. How is this 'journeying together' happening today in our parish/SCC/cluster? What steps is the Holy Spirit inviting us to take in order to grow in our journeying together?
2. How can our SCC/cluster become more capable of "walking together", listening to one another, participating in mission and engaging in dialogue?