

Mission as Synodality

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ, Good Morning.

I thank the SEDOS Executive Committee for having selected the theme *Mission as Synodality* for this Day of On-going Formation for Missionaries. Thank you, Sr. Mary Barron, OLA, President of SEDOS and the UISG, for having invited me to share something about the Synod, and in a particular way to share my experience of the First Session of the Synodal Journey of the Church. I went to the Synod, not because I was well prepared on the theme, but because I was elected during the USG Assembly in May 2023 to attend on behalf of the USG. I am happy that at the Sixteenth Synod of Bishops, held at the Vatican, the presence of many lay people and consecrated men and women was deeply felt. It was beautiful that in the Synodality there was deep reflection on **communion, mission and participation** in the life of the Church, which is called to contribute to building up the Reign of God in our world today.

1. It is a good thing that the three of us who were invited to share on the Synod, happen to be a Sister, a Brother and a Priest, who belong to three missionary institutes and who hail from three continents. During the Synod we saw that one of the signs of the richness and the challenges facing the Synod has been the diversity of the experiences of our local Churches and the complex reality of our different mission contexts. It was seen that we are all striving to walk towards unity and communion of faith and mission praxis, despite the peculiarity of our particular fields of

evangelization. Every day at the Synod we prayed to the Holy Spirit, as done during the Second Vatican Council, reciting the well-known prayer of the *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*, ***we stand before You Holy Spirit, as we gather together in Your Name....***

2. As the point of departure for my sharing today, I was asked the question: **what aspects of the content of the Synod emerged as important for you?** I want to start with this citation from the Letter of the Participants at the Synod to the People of God: *Our assembly took place in the context of a world in crisis, whose wounds and scandalous inequalities resonated painfully in our hearts, infusing our work with a particular gravity, especially since some of us come from countries where war rages. We prayed for the victims of deadly violence, without forgetting all those who have been forced by misery and corruption to take the dangerous road of migration. We assured our solidarity and commitment alongside the women and men all over the world who are working to build justice and peace. Whatever came out as an important element during our sharing and discussion did not make us forget what is happening on in the world.*



3. Personally, I think that all the three themes for the First Session of the Synod which were

presented in the central part of the *Instrumentum Laboris* and discussed in more than 30 groups (round table groups) during the conversation in the Spirit, are all

important themes. It is my intention to share something on these points.

3.1 The SYNOD is a journey of communion and walking together: — the Church is Synodal by its nature and is called to grow in understanding this reality more and more, and in striving to live according to it. How can we be more fully a sign and instrument of union with God and of the unity of all humanity? Synod means walking together, being Church together, it is about belonging to each other, it is about making mine the joy and the suffering of my brothers and sisters. It is about being in communion and journeying towards unity of heart. It is about sharing our resources together. It is about planning, deciding and implementing it together, each contributing according to one's charism and state of life. It is about being inclusive among ourselves and with others *ad extra*.... What are we going to offer so that our life may be transformed as individuals, communities and society? How be intercultural, intergenerational and inclusive of all? Listening to the accounts from the different backgrounds and contexts of the Church during the Synod, it was clear that our journey of communion is full of diversity and that the challenges met on our Synodal journey have been different according to the place and context in which we live. What becomes a priority for a particular-local Church in Europe, in North America or in Australia is not automatically a priority for the Church in Latin America. May not, what is a challenge for one of the many particular contexts of Christian communities in Africa or very crucial for one of the Churches in Asia, be at times very different from each other? Some of the priorities and the experience of the Churches of the Eastern Tradition are not the same as those of the Roman-Latin Tradition.

But, as we grow in faith, responding to our call to live and serve together in our religious and missionary communities, we have reciprocal enrichment, common problems and challenges as we become one community. In our day, our particular

Churches have mixed experiences since we form a community of people hailing from different communities and backgrounds. There are also people who feel left out on the margins of our societies and communities who ask to be heard, and included in the life of the Church. The question is: How can we create communion and walking together with them?

3.2 Another very important issue on the Synodal journey is that of collective responsibility in the Mission: How can we grow in sharing our gifts and tasks in the service of the Gospel?

These were some of the questions which we took seriously during our conversation in the Spirit. How can we walk together towards a shared awareness of the meaning and content of mission? What should be done so that a Synodal Church is also an 'all ministerial' missionary Church? *How prepared and equipped is the Church today to proclaim the Gospel with conviction, freedom of spirit and effectiveness? How does the perspective of a Synodal Church transform the understanding of mission and enable its different dimensions to be articulated? How does the experience of accomplishing mission together enrich the understanding of synodality?* (*Instrumentum Laboris* B.2.1).

Pope Francis, reminding all of us of our call to be missionaries, has told us: *"In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptized, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ*

Jesus: we no longer say that we are ‘disciples’ and ‘missionaries’”, but rather that we are always ‘missionary disciples’”, (EG, n. 120).

The Church continues to proclaim the Gospel with conviction and firmness, as this has been her call throughout the centuries. Thanks be to God, the Church tries to continue its work of evangelization by reading the sign of the times and the signs of places or contexts in order to qualify it, or ask the Holy Spirit to qualify it, to give quality to its mission. We are all called to walk and serve together in our reality of today. The Church is increasingly opening itself to new types of ministry, in particular those involving the laity and, in a special way, women. Some realities of missionary initiatives make us grow in responsibility and enrich synodality, through internationality, intercultural exchanges, intergenerational working together, healthy relationships and the equal responsibility of men and women, going beyond any social tension, division, discrimination and marginalisation.

- ❖ When the Holy Father decided, with the Secretariat of the Synod, that there was a need to make the Church Synodal — in which we are — he expressed a lot of hope, in communion with the whole Church, that through this Synodal journey of faith, all will understand more and more that we have a collective responsibility in the threefold dimension of the missionary commitment of evangelization in the life of the Church at the service of the Kingdom of GOD.
- ❖ We are all responsible in the big commitment of the *KERYGMA* of the Gospel. All of us are baptised in order to experience the love of God, and we are called to share this love through our daily efforts to proclaim Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. Where it is not possible to proclaim the Gospel openly, we continue to speak about God through our way of life. We increasingly need the laity to participate more in this commitment to Proclaim Jesus. We need to invest in preparing more and more lay people in order to form them deeply into joyful missionary disciples, who can give the reason for their own faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, which transforms their individual and social life.

- ❖ We are all responsible disciples called to witness to Jesus Christ and the Gospel in our individual and communitarian life. The commitment of the Church to witness to Christ, *MARTYRIA*, or Christian witness, is not about our effort to live according to the will of God, living an exemplary life as individuals and communities, but it is about our missionary contribution, because our manner of life is a concrete way of preaching Jesus Christ and building up the Kingdom of God. If we all, in a contagious way, try to live our faith as one family, overcoming every barrier and becoming more and more brothers and sisters among ourselves, people will see the love which is among us and they will glorify God. We are called to continue our journey of conversion as we strive for holiness, and we are invited to have a very good relationship with God, among ourselves and with nature. Should we have a wrong and unjust relationship among ourselves as individuals and communities, it would be difficult to speak about Christian witness, about becoming one family or preaching by our example, about our Lord Jesus Christ in whom there is no division, no discrimination among human beings. The Holy Spirit, who gives us the various gifts we have and makes us united, is present if we pray and discern together. It is beautiful to see that we are all trying to understand the Synodal nature of the Church better, as it invites all of us to participate in the mission of the Church according to our possibilities and charisms.
- ❖ The mission of the Church is to be a sacramental presence which expresses our service to a wounded humanity, in a world wounded by conflict, war and climatic calamities. The service or the *DIAKONIA* element in the mission of the Church calls for the participation of everyone. The Service of Charity for those in need of care and love in our communities and cities, the commitment for Justice and Peace and the Integration of Creation, the wearing and demanding service of working for peace and reconciliation among communities and nations, the effort to work to preserve creation and our common home, etc. ... all this is *DIAKONIA*. The clergy, consecrated men and women, and the laity ought to perform this service together

because we need each other so that we can combine our strength and our resources to serve our brothers and sisters. In this commitment of service to humanity, we are working with other Christians, adherents of other religions, as well as those who do not belong to any religion or who don't believe in God.

3.3 **Participation, Governance and**

Authority: the third very important point, which was discussed during the Synod, dealt with Participation, Governance and Authority. The following questions were raised during our discussions and conversation in the Spirit.

- a. How can we renew the service of authority and the exercise of responsibility in a Missionary Synodal Church? How can we develop discernment practices and decision-making processes in an authentically Synodal manner that respects the main, central role of the Holy Spirit? What structures can be developed to strengthen a missionary Synodal Church? How can we give structure to instances of synodality and collegiality to groupings of local Churches?
- b. How can the institution of the Synod be strengthened so that it is an expression of episcopal collegiality within an all-Synodal Church? How can we renew the service of authority and the exercise of responsibility in a Missionary Synodal Church?

These questions brought to mind other questions, such as: Do we have Gospel-minded thought about authority or are we talking about it in a worldly manner?

- 3.3.1 **Gratitude to those who serve:** — we are all aware of the importance of the service of authority and it is clear that Clericalism, with its mistaken idea of privilege, is a negative reality in our communities. It has affected how we serve in positions of authority, because there is a lack of collective responsibility as well as the exercise of power without accountability. At the same time, we are grateful to our brothers and sisters who have accepted to serve in positions of

authority and responsibility at the service of the mission of the Church. Yes, many of us know from experience that service in authority, whether it is as a lay faithful, a priest, a Bishop, or a consecrated person, demands a lot of the servant called to leadership. We are all aware that we have accepted to serve a needy community of brothers and sisters on behalf of Christ, in addition to our own personal journey of missionary discipleship which is already difficult for each of us. There is a lot of responsibility and pain involved in serving our Church and individual communities. We are called to give ourselves, to give our time, to share our emotional and intellectual energy, to look for resources, to share responsibility with our brothers and sisters who are willing to do their part in carrying the heavy cross of responsibility and authority. We are called to work and serve, taking into consideration the issue of the shortage of personnel and our limited resources. We are aware that accounts of the past, such as those painful accounts of the abuse of power and of sexual abuse in the past and present, demand a lot of humility, patience and resilience. So, we thank all those who accept to serve and we pray for them.

3.3.2 **Co-Responsibility, Sharing the Service of Authority:**

to serve together is wonderful and a blessing for all. The Mission is God's and the Church belongs to God. It has to be and our common responsibility is to walk, witness, and serve together. It is a blessing of God that we all serve according to our own charism and call to be missionary disciples. It is better to combine our gifts, resources and skills because in this way we help each other in our missionary call to proclaim, witness and serve Christ, suffering humanity and devastated/exploited nature. We need to be accountable and responsible for our actions. People in the service of authority do not need to feel threatened by the co-responsibility of the laity, women and men, who are a blessing for the community. We all need to be

filled with faith and the Holy Spirit (Acts 6, 3), which is best exercised when we dialogue, consult and discern together in the community; besides being accountable for our decisions and actions.



encouraged to work together. Evaluate jointly the resources available, in the region for priests and laity (together and separately if needed), in order to offer opportunities for Formation and On-going Formation on

3.3.3 Synodality demands that the Initial and Ongoing Formation of Our Leaders and Servants Be Evaluated: — We are

in need of deep initial and ongoing formation as missionary disciples, whether we are lay faithful or ordained ministers we need to be humble, in need of being formed, guided and helped. The whole issue of ongoing formation includes spiritual direction, ongoing accompaniment and the spiritual experience of faith and prayer. To be responsible for the community demands a lot of the person, spiritually and emotionally, so we need times for nurturing ourselves as individuals and communities. Thus, we become a stronger community and Church around the Word of God and the Holy Eucharist. Synodality is about belonging to each other, being one family, which comes before planning, deciding and doing things together.

4. Some suggestions our groups made I think are important. They are part of the synthesis report below:

a. How do we form our seminarians, candidates to the priesthood, permanent deacons, lay leaders, catechists and candidates to consecrated life? We need to develop on-going formation programmes more fully, as well as the culture of collaborative on-going formation for those in ministry and leadership. Episcopal (Bishops') Conferences and the Conference of Major Religious Superiors are

Servant Leadership, including service, decision-making, evaluating together, in the Church.

- b. The revision of the current *Ratio Fundamentalis* for priests and permanent deacons will reflect our commitment to be a Synodal Church. Synodal attitudes and practices are to be transmitted in the Seminary, and the seminarians' readiness to assume them is to be monitored, and addressed if any sign of resistance is shown.
- c. Transparency and accountability during moments of evaluation and programming together: - Creating a culture and structures of transparency and accountability helps to build up mutual trust and co-responsibility in the community. We suggest developing clear structures and practices of accountability so that all those in ministry know what will be in place and how it will be used to help them in their ministry. Willingness to take up a ministry involves a commitment to accountability and transparency.
- d. Canon Law is requesting that a Financial Council be set up in each parish and in every diocese. But what about the Parish-Pastoral Council which has become only optional? Since this is where growth and evaluation take place in the synodality of a community and the Church, why don't we revise/amend the Canon Law and make the Parish Council a mandatory law?