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Welcome and introduction

Theme: Mission as synodality - On the experience of living Synodality

Sisters and Brothers, I welcome you on behalf of the Executive Office of SEDOS to this Fall Seminar, hoping that each of us will be able to find during this day, enough spiritual and intellectual nourishment to stimulate our future missionary work .

It is an honor for me to say a few words to open our discussions on this very topical theme chosen for our SEDOS fall seminar this year on the theme of Mission as synodality - On the experience of living Synodality.

We are delighted that so many people are participating in this in-person seminar. There are more than 60 people in the room. We are grateful to UISG for allowing us to use its premises and equipment. Thanks to the interpreters who will facilitate sharing in the different languages.

We thank the members of the SEDOS Executive Committee, more particularly the SEDOS operational team: Father John Paul Hermann, SVD, the Director of SEDOS, Sr Céline Kokkat, CJMJ. (Congregation of Jesus Mary Joseph), Secretary; Sr. Christina, CJMJ (Congregation of Jesus Mary Joseph).

Thank you for coming to join us to participate and make your contribution to this Fall Seminar.

The theme of this seminar concerns Mission as synodality. This morning, we will hear testimonies from three consecrated persons who participated in the Synod assembly on synodality, which was held in Rome from October 4 to 28. Thank you to them for agreeing to be active participants in this day: Sister Mary Barron, OLA, Superior General of Notre-Dame des Apôtres, President of SEDOS and President of the UISG; P. Tesfaye Tadesse, Superior General of the Comboni Missionaries (MCCJ), Mark Hilton SC, Superior General of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart. Having been delegates to the Synod assembly on Synodality, along with over 362 other participants from around the world, our three speakers will share with us this morning what their experience of the synod was like and the highlights, which of their points of view, characterized this historic synodal assembly. They will share with us their experience of this historic ordinary general meeting.

Their testimonies will serve as a backdrop for the sharing and celebration of synodality in the afternoon. The idea is to experience synodality at the deepest level between us, based on what we hear this morning, from our three speakers, or what we have heard around us, and/or in our communities. And then, using

the approach adopted by the Synodal Assembly of Rome, "conversations in the Spirit", we will listen to each other and try to hear what the Holy Spirit has to say to us during of this day that we will spend together in prayer and reflection.

As I reflect on this subject in view of today, a number of points, taken from the synthesis report, seem particularly important to me and, in this brief introduction, I will mention only two: 1) Mission as synodality and 2) synodal co-responsibility in the mission.

1) Mission as synodality

The Constitution Praedicate Evangelium underlines the link between synodality and mission which finds its source in the Church as a mystery of communion. This mystery of communion, the document continues, "gives the Church the face of synodality: a Church of mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the Episcopal College, the Bishop of Rome, each listening to the others; and all listening to the Holy Spirit, "the Spirit of Truth" (Jn 14:17), to know what he says to the Churches (Rev 2:7). This synodality of the Church will then be understood as the "walking together" of the flock of God on the paths of history to encounter Christ the Lord" [8]. It is about the mission of the Church, about this communion which is for the mission and which is itself missionary. » (PE 4).

Mission is the vocation of the entire people of God. Each baptized person is a full member of the Church. Lumen Gentium names all the baptized as 'people of God' and Ad Gentes declares the work of evangelization as a fundamental duty of the People of God. Pope Francis, by implementing synodality in mission, wants to encourage all Christians to become missionaries. In Evangelii Gaudium, the Pope widely uses the notion of 'missionary-disciple': the baptized, from the first to the last, are all missionary disciples by virtue of the baptism received.

For Francis, it would be inadequate to think of the mission only through qualified actors, where the rest of the faithful people would only be destined to benefit from their actions. To the extent that there are experiences of the love of the Lord which gives comfort and good hope, whatever their function in the Church and the level of instruction of their faith, all the baptized are subjects of the evangelization.

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops, the Pope speaks of ecclesial synodality, where the hierarchical principle is kept but transformed into "an inverted pyramid, the top being at the base". This is a reminder to all who exercise the authority of a 'minister' that they should see themselves as servants of God's people, after the model of Jesus, the servant of servants. For the Pope, synodality is a constitutive

dimension of the Church and it is what God expects of the Church of the third millennium.

And the synodal Church is the Church of sharing, of communion where baptized Christians share the mission and the pastoral organization of the ecclesial community. The awareness that we are all Church, also called synodality, changes not only our ecclesial conception, but also our missionary conception. Synodality therefore goes hand in hand with mission. “It designates above all the particular style which determines the life and mission of the Church whose nature it expresses as the fact of walking together and coming together in an assembly of the People of God summoned by the Lord Jesus in the strength of the Holy -Spirit to announce the Gospel. » Any mission must have synodality as its horizon.

The final report itself provides a comprehensive definition of the term synodality. “Synodality can be understood as the walk of Christians with Christ and towards the Kingdom, with all humanity; oriented towards the mission, it involves meeting in assembly at the different ecclesial levels of life, listening to one another, dialoguing, discerning together, seeking consensus as an expression of the living presence of Christ in the Spirit, and to make decisions within the framework of differentiated co-responsibility”.

2) Synodal co-responsibility in the mission

The Second Vatican Council undoubtedly brought a revolution in the life of the Catholic Church, particularly in the ecclesiological order of things, by making it a people of God. From then on, the distinction between clerics and laity, previously perceived as a herd led by the latter, now lost its meaning. The institution of the Church as the people of God heralded the time of the community within which it was necessary to redefine the types of relationships between clergy and laity in the pastoral care and very mission of the Church.

“It has already been two years since, at the request of Pope Francis, a long process of listening and discernment began, open to all the people of God, without exception, in order to 'walk together', under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, missionary disciples following Christ Jesus. » Walking together is the wish of Pope Francis for our Church and therefore for the community that constitutes it. A prophetic wish in a society increasingly marked by social inequalities and compartmentalization, by the rise of populism and fear of “the other”. Walking together means that we, as the Church, do not set out alone, but are aware of all those who might accompany us. We must wait for each other, support each other and leave no one behind. Not just us, the members of the Church, but everyone else as well.

Co-responsibility is the main word to remember from this synod. He tackles the question of Church government and calls for management linking bishops, priests and laity. The *Instrumentum Laboris* placed the theme of co-responsibility in the mission at the center of discernment (B.2). It referred to the exchange between the Churches on the subjects of communion (IL 35) and mission (IL 22, 41). He had suggested a preliminary question to the five questions that followed: How to share gifts and missions in the service of the Gospel? This theological reflection examines the intrinsic link between synodality and mission (1); the co-responsibility of the baptized (2); sharing in the service of the Gospel (3).

The synod's final report calls for greater "co-responsibility" in the Church of all believers in the mission of evangelization - and proposes concrete reforms to achieve this. It implements synodality in Church governance, theology, mission and discernment of doctrine and pastoral matters. This summary document includes notable proposals to establish new ministries for the laity, to increase lay participation in decision-making, to create processes for evaluating the exercise of the ministry of bishops, to modify the way of which the Church discerns "controversial" issues and to expand the footprint of synodal assemblies in the future. "The exercise of co-responsibility is essential for synodality and is necessary at all levels of the Church," says the final report. "Each Christian is a mission in the world. "This is Jesus' approach: creating spaces for everyone so that no one feels excluded."

Having said this, we must not lose sight of the fact that the synod is, moreover, above all a spiritual event. "Without prayer, no synod," Pope Francis said. It is not only mutual listening, but also listening to the Holy Spirit which must guide the discourse. Feeling what God wants from his Church: this is the objective of the synod research process, in which all the people of God must participate. By having conversations in the Spirit, we seek to listen to the voice of God speaking to us through the Holy Spirit, as He gradually opens our hearts and minds to what He has to say to us. Pope Francis has repeatedly reminded us that a synod is not a parliament. This is not about taking sides, being partisan, or dividing into political factions. The synod is a privileged space for discernment, where the Holy Spirit is present and at work as we gather and listen to one another.

These are just a few considerations intended to whet our appetite for the discussions we will have during the rest of the day. All that remains for me to do is wish you a fruitful and exciting fall seminar.

I wish each of us and the entire Assembly a time of fruitful listening to the Spirit.