

## THE SYNOD – THREE KEY WORDS

In his address at the October 9<sup>th</sup> opening of the Synod, Pope Francis identified three key words for this ecclesial event: *communion*, *mission*, and *participation*.

**Communion** – unity – a fraternity of those embraced by the one love of God: this is what we are called to as followers of Christ. All of us, and in particular those who are bishops, must work to fulfill Christ's Last Supper prayer for his disciples: "that they may all be one" (Jn 17:12).

*As Saint Cyprian wrote: "We must maintain and firmly uphold this unity, above all ourselves, the bishops who preside in the Church, in order to demonstrate that the episcopate is itself one and undivided" (De Ecclesiae Catholicae Unitate, 5). In the one People of God, therefore, let us journey together, in order to experience a Church that receives and lives this gift of unity, and is open to the voice of the Spirit.*

From our *communion* as Church, we can advance our **mission** of building up the Kingdom through our proclamation of the Gospel. These two theological terms describe the mystery of the Church. *Communion* is its very nature and its *mission* is to establish among all peoples the Kingdom of God, and it is, on earth, the beginning of that Kingdom.

*With those two words, the Church contemplates and imitates the life of the Blessed Trinity, a mystery of communion ad intra and the source of mission ad extra. ... Commemorating the opening of the Council, (St. Paul VI) stated that its main lines were in fact "communion, that is, cohesion and interior fullness, in grace, truth and collaboration ... and mission, that is, apostolic commitment to the world of today" (Angelus of 11 October 1970).*

In 1985, concluding a Synod of Bishops marking the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Vatican II, St. John Paul II reiterated that the Church's nature is *koinonia*. This Greek word refers to a spiritual fellowship, an intimate communion and participative sharing in a spiritual community. For Christians, that fellowship gives rise to their mission of serving as a sign of humanity's intimate union with God. He also noted that Synods must be well prepared: "it is necessary that the local Churches work at their preparation with the participation of all."

**Participation** – the third key word. *Communion* and *mission* risk being abstract unless it is the Church's practice to regularly encourage real involvement on each one's part.

*I would say that celebrating a Synod is always a good and important thing, but it proves truly beneficial if it becomes a living expression of "being Church", of a way of acting marked by true participation. This is not a matter of form, but of faith. Participation is a requirement of the faith received in baptism.*

*As the Apostle Paul says, "in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body" (1 Cor 12:13). In the Church, everything starts with baptism. Baptism, the source of our life, gives rise to the equal dignity of the children of God, albeit in the diversity of ministries and charisms. Consequently, all the baptized are called to take part in the Church's life and mission. Without real participation by the People of God, talk about communion risks remaining a devout wish. ... Enabling everyone to participate is an essential ecclesial duty! All the baptized, for baptism is our identity card.*