

Pope Francis, in an authoritative way and with great frequency, speaks of the need to live synodality in today's church. In his opinion, living and establishing the synodality in the church is not only the greatest urgency, but the future of the church and the remedy for many pathologies that seem devastating and painful today depend on the practice of the synodality. And for us missionaries it can really be a great opportunity and bridge that helps and binds the Churches of the South with those of the North.

After the Second Vatican Council we were used to talking about episcopal and presbyteral "collegiality", while the term "synodality" was rarely present in Catholic ecclesial language. And when synodality was evoked, it was done in reference to the institutions of the Eastern-Orthodox churches, indicating with the term "synodality" their form of government. It is significant that in the years between the two millennia a project for a permanent synod was outlined and presented first to John Paul II and then to Benedict XVI, to accompany him in his Petrine ministry of concern for all the churches. This project was elaborated by some of the greatest theologians and ecclesiologists and was brought to the attention of the two popes with great hope. This is how the synod was conceived and dreamt of, as a renewal of the form of government of the church. But it was Pope Francis who pushed for it, supported it and strongly wanted it for a change in the Church.

It is therefore a matter of knowing how to read and listen to reality with its unexpected critical issues. Listening therefore becomes listening to one another, in the desire to learn something from the other and to welcome one another: listening to everyone, strong or weak members, just or sinners, intelligent or simple, men or women, is a practical confession and a celebration of the unity of the baptized in Christ. All have the same dignity as sons and daughters of God and therefore as brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ: "one body, one spirit, one vocation" (cf. Eph 4:4), one ecclesial communion! The church is a fraternity (adelphotes: 1Pt 2,17; 5,9), Christians are "living stones of the spiritual building" (1Pt 2,5) which is the church and in each of them is present the Holy Spirit, that "sniff" - says Pope Francis - which enables them to narrate the wonders accomplished by the Lord, to recognize his action and to live their lives as dynamics of the Kingdom.

A prophetic, priestly and kingly community, the Church is nourished by the co-responsibility of all, in the plurality of gifts and ministries given by the Holy Spirit to each one. The synodal journey is the journey of this reality which treads the same path, to remain united in a real communion, to reach the same goal: the kingdom of God. Speaking is therefore essential in the life of the Church, because it means communicating, entering into a discussion, into a dialogue that shapes those who listen to each other and creates in them solidarity and co-responsibility. Thus synodality is generative of an ecclesial conscience, of a thought out and motivated faith that makes every baptized person a protagonist of the life and mission of the Church.

To discern and deliberate is an ecclesial act, inspired by the word of God, the fruit of the examination of the signs of the times, generated by listening and fraternal confrontation which requires the contribution of each and everyone to come to elaborate and decide together what is then decided

by pastoral authority, which cannot do without the contribution of the various ministries and ecclesial charisms. The synodality does not therefore end in a celebrated event (a synod) but must appear as the daily style of the church: walking together, pastors and people of God, in the pilgrimage that the whole church makes towards the Kingdom.

Initiating synodal processes in the church, in institutes, religious and parish communities is not only urgent but also crucial, to prevent a situation of disjointed Christian and religious communities that no longer feel communion in the local church and in the Catholic, universal and fraternal community.

Let us be clear, however: in this understanding, a synod cannot be an assembly reserved to "leaders", to the hierarchy, to those at the head of groups or institutions, but it is an assembly of the baptized in which all and everyone must be heard, must engage in dialogue that does not exclude conflict, must find convergence in ecclesial fraternal charity, must produce a deliberation to be observed.

Further readings:

Coda, P – Repore, R. (a cura di). (2019). *La sinodalità nella vita e nella missione della Chiesa. Commento a più voci del Documento della Commissione Teologica Internazionale*, Bologna: EDB.

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Francesco. (2018). *Episcopalis communio. Apostolic Constitution on the Synod of Bishops*.

Spadaro, A. – Galli, C. (2018). La sinodalità nella vita e nella missione della Chiesa, in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, Quaderno 4039, pp. 55-70.