



Message



Christmas 2022

Dear Sisters,

"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children." (Galatians 4:4-5)

In the fullness of time, an incredible leap was made in our salvation history. Mary conceived the Word of God through the power of the Holy Spirit, who, in turn was given to humanity as a great gift! We can say that this was the primordial "synodal journey" of the Son of God. As we celebrate this holy season of Christmas, let us spend time to contemplate this unfathomable mystery of God's great love for us.

All of us are probably aware and have been actively involved in the ongoing synodal process in the Church which will culminate with the two sessions of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops that will take place from October 4 to 29, 2023, and in October 2024. I am sure that you have also been widely informed about the aim, structures, process, and other important elements of this Synod on Synodality. But in anticipation of our forthcoming Council of Congregation in February 2023 with the theme: "Synodality and Religious Life," allow me to reflect with you what it means to be a synodal person in our everyday life. I believe that the perfect model for us in this journey is no other than Mary.

Mary demonstrates the characteristics of living the synodal journey. She was always in COMMUNION with the Triune God, willingly received the love of the Father, offering herself wholeheartedly to PARTICIPATE in the work of redemption, and ever faithful to her special MISSION in the plan of

salvation. She embodies the virtues that we must emulate in order to fully live the synodal journey as a Congregation and as a Church.

The first characteristic of Mary as a synodal person is LISTENING. Through her **attentive listening and openness to God**, Mary fulfilled her mission in bringing Christ to the world. She did not only “hear,” which is superficial, but “listened” to God and “*treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart*” (Lk2:19). Her listening consists of attention, unconditional acceptance, and total availability to God. Mary also listens to the events, that is, she is attentive to reality itself and ponders in her heart in order to grasp its meaning. She listened to an angel as the messenger of God, listened to Elizabeth at the Visitation, listened to civil law and went to Bethlehem for the census, listened to strangers, to the three Magis, to the shepherds, listened and obeyed religious laws as she presented Jesus in the temple, and listened to Simeon and Anna. So, to be a synodal person, Mary reminds us of the call to listen attentively to God with an openness to the Holy Spirit, to listen to the events of life, and to pay attention to people, especially the poor and the marginalized in our communities.

In his message at the opening of the Synod, Pope Francis stressed that “the Synod offers us the opportunity to become a **listening Church**, to break out of our routine and pause from our pastoral concerns in order to stop and listen. To listen to the Spirit in adoration and prayer.”¹ The Pope further noted that to be a listening Church means “to listen to our brothers and sisters speak of their hopes and of the crises of faith present in different parts of the world.”² True listening is not only with the ears but more so to listen with the heart. By listening in this way, we hear not just words, but we discover a place of feeling and of meaning in the depths of our inner being. Moreover, listening to others from the heart, makes them feel that they are being heard and not judged; and so, they freely open their hearts and share their own experiences and their spiritual journey.

At this point, let us honestly ask ourselves...what is the quality of our listening? Do we take time to truly listen to God in prayer and allow His Word to penetrate our hearts or has prayer become a routine? Genuine prayer

¹ Pope Francis, *Message During the Opening of the Synod*, 9 October 2021.

² Ibid.

engenders receptivity to the workings of the Spirit and moves us to conversion and transformation. How do we listen to our Sisters in the community and the people around us? Do we listen to them with the “ears of our heart”? Do we allow people to express themselves openly, to walk with them in faith through their difficulties in life, and to be part of the life of the community without judging nor condemning them?

Another characteristic of Mary that is important for our synodal journey is DIALOGUE. In the Bible, Mary’s conversations are recorded on four different occasions: at the Annunciation (Lk1:26-38), in her encounter with Elizabeth and her Magnificat (Lk 1:46-56), in the finding of the child Jesus in the temple (Lk 2:41-52) and at the wedding in Cana (Jn. 2:1-11). Mary’s words and disposition in these accounts give us a glimpse of who she is as a woman of dialogue. In her dialogue with the angel, Mary asked: “*How can this be, since I have no husband?*” (Lk 1:34) Mary was not expressing her skepticism nor demanding for a proof that ends any further discussion; rather, with her inquiry, she entered more deeply into the dialogue, expressing a willingness to grasp something holy and mysterious. Mary reminds us that to be able to enter into genuine dialogue, we need first of all to empty our hearts of our own agenda, of all that clutters our life; to empty our hearts of our own assumptions and prejudices; to empty our minds of all the preconceived answers and solutions we might raise.

The document prepared by the International Theological Commission on the Synod on Synodality, explains that “synodal dialogue” demands the courage both in speaking and in listening. It is not about engaging in a debate where one speaker tries to convince others with rough arguments, but about expressing and accepting whatever seems to have been suggested by the Holy Spirit “for the general good” (1 Corinthians 12:7).³ In other words, true dialogue should be a spiritual communication, which requires specific attitudes of love, respect, trust, prudence, and humility. Persons in dialogue should be of “one heart and one mind,” avoiding at all costs any spirit of jealousy or competition.

Let us assess our community meetings or interchanges, as well as our

³ International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, no. 111.

capacity to enter into dialogue. Do we experience a genuine dialogue or simply a debate? Is there an atmosphere of openness and respect where everyone is given the opportunity to “express her own views and to hear those of others?”⁴ Do we actively participate and openly share our views without fear of being rejected?

Thirdly, Mary as a synodal person is a woman of SERVICE. Mary manifests to us that service starts with humility. Her response to the angel Gabriel is the standard set for all of us: “*Let it be done to me according to your word*” (Lk 2:38). The same attitude is demanded of us whose mission in life is to serve others: “*Lord, however and wherever you want me to serve you, I will obey. Give me the grace to know and follow your will.*” Mary’s visitation to her cousin Elizabeth, reveals to us the highest form of service, which is to **lead other people to Jesus**. In our own acts of service, we are to communicate the presence of Jesus to those we serve. Likewise, Mary is keenly attentive to the needs of others in every situation. At the wedding feast of Cana, she sees that there is no more wine and promptly responds. God’s will for us is communicated through the needs of those around us. Consequently, we must be attentive in every situation we find ourselves, sensitive to what is needed, and ensure that the need is responded to.

Synodality, as the Vademecum explains, “is a path by which the Church can more fruitfully fulfil her mission of evangelization in the world, as a leaven at the service of the coming of God’s kingdom.”⁵ This Synodal Process is intended to enable the Church to better witness to the Gospel, especially to be of service to those who live on the spiritual, social, economic, political, geographical, and existential peripheries of our world.

And so, Sisters, in this season of grace, let us walk with Mary, woman of listening, dialogue, and service, as she leads us into the synodal path. Individually and as a community, let us endeavor to have a change of attitude, a change of heart and mentality; thus, making our little contribution to help build a synodal Church where everybody can feel at home. In the words of Pope Francis, “It is not enough to have a synod, **we have to be a synod!**”

⁴ Book of Life, Article 37.

⁵ Synod of Bishops, *Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality*, September 2021.

From all of us at the Generalate, we extend our heartfelt wishes for a holy Christmas and a new year full of blessings! May Jesus be born in our hearts time after time, giving birth to a Church called to serve the Kingdom of God!

With the assurance of my affection and prayers.

Sr Maria Guethi Lee
Superior General

