



Message

"Joseph went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem, because he was descended from the house and family of David." (Lk. 2:4)

Christmas 2023


Dear Sisters,

Each year, in faith and prayer, we are invited to journey with Mary and Joseph, with the shepherds and wise men, to go to Bethlehem and to adore the new born King.

As we engage in our Christmas celebrations this year, let us reflect more deeply on the meaning of "journeying together" in the light of the orientations presented in the synthesis of the recently concluded first session of the Synod on Synodality. I encourage you read prayerfully the synthesis and be actively involved in the implementation processes organized by your respective local churches. Pope Francis, at the onset of the synodal process, reminded us that "communion and mission can risk remaining somewhat abstract, unless we cultivate an ecclesial praxis that expresses the concreteness of synodality (...) encouraging real involvement on the part of each and all." (October 9, 2021)

On the Congregational level, I would like to share some reflections based on the synthesis, particularly its implications for our life of consecration, communion, and mission. Throughout this sacred season of Advent and Christmas, it becomes apparent that "journeying together" is an integral part of the Christmas narrative. Our pilgrimage to Bethlehem is not merely a physical journey to a place or city but a transformative experience leading us to encounter Jesus and adore Him as the Lord of heaven and earth. The Gospels present three distinct "journeys" for our prayerful reflection as we celebrate the birth of Christ.

The first journey is that of Mary and Joseph, not only from Nazareth to Bethlehem, but also from the Annunciation to the birth of Jesus. Envisioning Mary and Joseph on their way to Bethlehem brings to mind the challenges, weariness, yet also the joy, emotion, and anxiety of finding a place to stay. Both Mary and Joseph had profound encounters with God through angelic messages. They listened, discerned the movements of the Spirit, and shared their spiritual experiences with each other. The Synod's synthesis report acknowledges the positive "practice of conversation in the Spirit" in many Congregations but laments the "persistence of an authoritarian style" that hinders dialogue. (*Synthesis Report*, 22) This is a challenge on the manner we conduct our meetings and engage in conversations in the community. If we do not seriously practice conversation in the Spirit during community meetings and faith-sharing, we risk missing the opportunity to discern and genuinely listen to one another.



True conversation in the Spirit involves the quality of our capacity to listen as well as the quality of words spoken. It guides us to pay attention to spiritual movements within ourselves and others, revealing how the Lord is at work in us. Unfortunately, some still cling to positions of power, simply giving orders rather than inspiring initiatives and encouraging participation. In our fragmented world, there is an urgent call to cultivate a culture of respectful listening and dialogue characterized by trust, welcome, respect, and freedom of the spirit. Let us draw inspiration from the Holy Family, who, attuned to the Spirit, shared their love and faith with one another.

Our listening and dialogue must extend to include attentiveness to the earth and all its creatures. As Pope Francis emphasizes in *Laudate Deum*, the ecological crisis is a “global social issue intimately connected to the dignity of human life.” (*Laudate Deum*, 8) Every small step we take to care for our common home, reduce pollution and waste, and slow down global warming, contributes to personal and societal transformation, alleviating suffering for many.

The second journey was the one taken by the shepherds who, while “keeping watch their flock by night,” became the first to receive the proclamation of “good news of great joy **for all the people**.” (*Lk. 2:10*) The proclamation of “great joy” to the shepherds clearly underscores that Jesus came for everyone, regardless of economic standing, gender, race, ethnicity, or skin color. We too, with all our weaknesses and failures, are one with the shepherds, who were certainly not saints. God’s love embraces us just as it did for them.

Recognizing the Spirit’s ability to communicate through individuals of diverse religious beliefs and cultures, the Synod on Synodality consistently emphasized the need for deeper communion and active participation of all the People of God in the Church’s mission. The synthesis report highlights the need for a testimony that urgently seeks unity among humanity, acknowledging a shared origin and destiny, fostering coordinated and reciprocal solidarity in the pursuit of social justice, peace, reconciliation, and care for our common home. (*Synthesis Report*, 13) This poses a challenge to examine our attitudes towards those we perceive as “different from us” – be it in beliefs, traditions, orientations, status, ethnicity, or culture. It impels us to evaluate how we provide services in education, healthcare, and pastoral ministry. Are our efforts free from discrimination or exclusion? True to our charism, do we put those who experience all forms of poverty at the core of our life and mission? Are we receptive to learning from those we serve?

Another striking characteristic of the shepherds warrants contemplation: their response to the angel’s message. Pope Benedict XVI, in his 2009 Christmas homily, noted that upon hearing the angelic proclamation, the shepherds declared to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem ... and they went in haste.” (*Lk. 2:15 ff*) Their prompt response stemmed not only from curiosity but, more significantly, from their excitement at receiving such extraordinary news—news conveyed to the seemingly insignificant and least expected. In our daily lives, do we give priority to matters of God? Like the shepherds, do we go “in haste” to adore the Lord when it’s time to pray, or are we more in a hurry to engage in our favorite television programs or check social media updates? The Gospel reminds us: God should be our foremost priority!

The third journey is that of the Magi from the East (*Mt. 2:1*) who travelled towards Bethlehem in search for the new born King. Upon finding the Child and His Mother, they paid homage and presented their gifts. Remarkably, the Magi chose to return to their own country "by another road" (*Mt. 2:12*). This act symbolizes the call for us to embark on a different route in our own journey—a distinct path apart from that of Herod or the ways of the world. Similar to the Magi, we are urged to embrace alternative routes, revealing the creative spirit that consistently introduces new possibilities. This creativity is a significant aspect of the Synod's mission: to journey together and to listen to one another, so that the Spirit can inspire new ways to convey the Gospel to the hearts of those who are distant, indifferent or without hope, yet continue to seek what the Magi found: "a great joy" (*Mt. 2:10*).

Synodality beckons us to undergo conversion, advocating that the Church is a community journeying towards truth. Our ability to support others is dependent upon our commitment to both personal and communal conversion. Together we are called to continue to care for human life, the protection of creation, the dignity of work, the problems of families, the treatment of the elderly and all those who are abandoned, rejected or treated with contempt. In a word, we are called to be a Church that promotes the culture of care, tenderness and compassion towards the vulnerable.

As we journey together towards Bethlehem and engage in the synodal process, let us invite **Emmanuel**, our redeeming and compassionate God, to transform our narrative and illuminate our lives. May the light of Christ dwelling within each of us radiate brightly, guiding others towards the warmth of His love. In doing so, may the words of Isaiah—"the people who walked in darkness have seen a great light"—become a tangible reality in both our lives and the lives of those we serve.

From all of us at the Generalate, we extend our heartfelt wishes for a Christmas filled with the peace that surpasses understanding, the joy that overflows from the heart, and the love that unites us in Christ. Have a blessed Christmas!

With the assurance of my affection and prayers.

St. Mauro Gattini Lee
Superior General

