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The Amazon Synod: An Occasion to Walk Together

From October 6 to 27, the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon region will take place in Rome. Italian priest, Fr. Marco Vanzini, offers some perspectives and suggests ways that everyone can participate.

10/07/2019

In a few days, the entire Church will live, together with the Pope and the bishops reunited with him, a new

synodal event. Every time an event like this takes place, even if its focus is very specific –in this case, it will concern the life and problems of the Amazon– every Christian should feel personally involved.

The Church is a family united in the bond of love that is the Holy Spirit, and what concerns one or another of its children interests everyone. Saint Therese of Lisieux, known as “The Little Flower” whom we remembered recently in the liturgy, burned with the desire to reach every member of the body of the Church with her love, and she rejoiced to discover that this was possible in prayer: although she spent her life in a convent, she was declared the “patron of missions”.

Beyond Curiosity and Perplexity:
Omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam

Starting on October 6 with the Synod opening, each of us will be able to accompany the work of the Pope and the Synod Fathers with our prayer, also thanks to the news from the synod hall that will reach us through the media. With regard to the media, along with news and exchanging opinions, there are also worries circulating about some aspects of the issues at the heart of the conversation. Reading the preparatory documents of the Synod, together with sincere interest in the life and dramas of the peoples in the Amazon, there are also some doubts about the kind of tone adopted and the radical nature of some proposals, even when indicated as only potential practices in the Church.

This is not surprising. In fact, we should wonder were this not the case because, if the Amazon is raising a "cry" of help for protection and justice, we can hardly expect those

who make this cry to be as calm as those who hear it from a distance. The Church in the Amazon needs to be listened to. It needs to be able to lay down its sufferings and hopes at the heart of the whole Church, and to receive help so it can guide the life of the Church, its evangelization and pastoral action in the best way. And the universal Church responds to this need with a Synod.

In the *Instrumentum laboris* (n. 38) we read: "Dialogue is a process of learning, facilitated by 'openness to the transcendent' (EG 205) and hindered by ideologies." This frank and sincere dialogue, open to the transcendent action of the Spirit and free from the distorting lenses of ideologies inevitably in conflict, is what Pope Francis aspires to, and the whole Church with him. For this reason, every child of the Church is called in the coming days to join his prayer to that of the Pope, so that the

Synod is literally a "journeying together", *omnes cum Petro ad Iesum per Mariam*, as Saint Josemaría loved to say.

The First "Synod"

The first "synodal" event that the Church remembers was the Council of Jerusalem, which took place around the year 50 AD under the guidance of the apostles to address a problem related to the community of Antioch. The question was whether or not it was necessary to require the new converts from Greek-Roman paganism to observe the Mosaic prescriptions that the Christians coming from Judaism –among them, the apostles themselves– still practiced.

The decision, which was reached not without some tension, through dialogue and with the help of the Holy Spirit (see *Acts 15: 28-29*), was of vital importance for the whole

Church who, from that moment onward, could spread the *kerygma* – i.e. the announcement of Jesus Christ–in all its purity, to men of every race and culture. Every Council or Synod –with the struggles that normally precede, accompany and follow it– brings enrichment to the whole Church and a spur to its evangelizing mission.

The Mission of All the Baptized

The Synod on the Amazon will be held during the Extraordinary Missionary Month that Pope Francis has wanted for the whole Church. Thinking of the Church striving to light up the life and culture of the Amazon peoples with the Gospel also reminds us of the mission to incarnate the Gospel today in our own countries.

Although the tensions wearing down the biological and human ecosystem of the Amazon are not experienced

so dramatically here in Italy, the thirst for God in our secularized habitat is equally acute in other ways. This reminds us that the Church is essentially one and that its mission is fundamentally the same in every part of the world: that of being the "sign and instrument of a very closely knit union with God and of the whole human race." (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, n. 1).

Unity in dialogue, in faith and in charity will be the best witness and the best service that the Church can give the world on the privileged occasion that the Amazon Synod offers us.

Fr Marco Vanzini

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