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#synod24 – Greeting of the Holy Father at the conclusion of the Second Session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

The following is the greeting given by Pope Francis this afternoon in the Paul VI Hall, at the conclusion of the Second Session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops:

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

With this Final Document, we have gathered the fruits of at least three years in which we have been listening to the People of God in order better to understand how to be a “synodal Church” – it is by listening to the Holy Spirit – at this time. The biblical citations at the beginning of each chapter indicate the content by linking it to the gestures and words of the Risen Lord, who calls us to be witnesses of his Gospel, first with our lives and then using words.

The Document we have voted on is a threefold gift:

Firstly, for me, as Bishop of Rome, in convening the Church of God in Synod, I was aware that I needed all of you: Bishops and witnesses of the synodal journey. Thank you!

The Bishop of Rome, I frequently remind myself and each of you, also needs to practice listening, or rather he wishes to practice listening, in order to be able to respond to the Word that each day says to him, “Affirm your brothers and sisters...Feed my sheep”.

My task, as you well know, is to guard and promote – as Saint Basil teaches – the harmony that the Spirit continues to spread in the Church of God, in the relations between the Churches. Notwithstanding all the efforts, tensions and divisions that mark her journey toward the full manifestation of the Kingdom of God, which the Prophet Isaiah invites us to imagine as a banquet prepared by God for all peoples. All, in the hope that no one will miss out. All peoples, and nobody missing out! The key word is harmony. That is what the Spirit does. The first powerful manifestation of the Holy Spirit was on the morning of Pentecost, harmonising all those different languages. That is what the Second Vatican Council teaches when it says that the Church is “like a sacrament”. She is a sign and instrument of our expectant God, who has already prepared the table and is now waiting. His

grace, through his Spirit, whispers words of love into the heart of each person. It is up to us to amplify the voice of this whisper, without hindering it; by opening doors instead of erecting walls. It is harmful when women and men of the Church erect walls. Everyone is invited in! We must not behave as “dispensers of grace” who appropriate the treasure by tying the hands of our merciful God. Remember that we began this Synod Assembly by asking for forgiveness, experiencing shame and recognizing that we are all in need of mercy.

There is a poem by Madeleine Delbr el, a mystic of the peripheries who exhorted, “Above all, do not be rigid” – rigidity is a sin that sometimes creeps into the lives of the clergy or of consecrated persons. I will read some Madeleine Delbr el’s lines that are a prayer, she wrote:

*For I think that you may have had enough
of people who, always, speak of serving you with the look of a leader,
of encountering you with the air of a professor,
of approaching you with sporting regulations,
of loving you as one loves in an aged marriage.*

...

*Let us live our life,
not as a game of chess where everything is calculated, not as a
game where everything is difficult,
not as a theorem that breaks our minds,
but like an endless party where your meeting is renewed,
like a ball,
like a dance,
in the arms of your grace,
in the music that fills the universe with love.*

These verses can become the background music for welcoming the Final Document. In light of what has emerged from the synodal journey, there are and there will be decisions to be made.

In our time marked by wars, we must be witnesses of peace, even by learning how to live out our differences in conviviality.

For this reason, I do not intend to publish an Apostolic Exhortation, what we have approved is sufficient. There are already highly concrete indications in the Document that can be a guide for the mission of the Churches, in their specific continents and contexts. This is why I am making it immediately available to everyone, it is the reason I said that it should be published. In this way, I wish to recognize the value of the synodal journey accomplished, which by means of this Document I hand over to the holy faithful people of God.

On certain aspects of the life of the Church pointed out in the Document, as well as on the themes entrusted to the ten “Study Groups”, who work with freedom, to offer me proposals, more time is needed in order to arrive at decisions that involve the whole Church. I will continue to listen to the Bishops and the Churches entrusted to them.

This is not the classic way of postponing decisions indefinitely. It is the way that corresponds to the synodal style with which even the Petrine ministry is to be exercised: by listening, convening, discerning, deciding and evaluating. On this path we need pauses, silences and prayer. It is a style that we are still learning together, little by little. The Holy Spirit calls and supports us in this learning, which we need to understand as a process of conversion.

The General Secretariat of the Synod and all the Dicasteries of the Curia will help me in this task.

The Document is a gift to all the faithful people of God, by the variety of its expressions. It is obvious that not everyone will set out to read it. It will largely fall to you, together with many others, to make what it contains accessible in the local Churches. The text, without the witness of lived experience, would lose much of its value.

Dear brothers and sisters, what we have experienced is a gift that we cannot keep to ourselves. The impetus that comes from this experience, of which the Document is a reflection, gives us the courage to witness that it is possible to walk together in diversity, without condemning each other.

We come from all parts of the world, some marked by violence, poverty, indifference. Together, with the hope that does not disappoint, united in the love of God in our hearts, we should not only dream of peace but also commit ourselves with all our strength so that, perhaps without talking so much about synodality, peace will be realized through the processes of listening, dialogue and reconciliation. To set out on mission, the synodal Church now needs its shared words to be accompanied by actions. This is our journey.

All this is the gift of the Holy Spirit: *it is he who makes harmony because it is he who is harmony*. Saint Basil has a very beautiful theology on this, if you can read his treatise on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is harmony. Brothers and sisters, may harmony continue even as we leave this hall, and may the Breath of the Risen One help us to share the gifts that we have received.

Remember – in Madeleine Delbrêl’s words – that “there are places in which the Spirit breathes, but there is only one Spirit who breathes in all places”.

I would like to thank all of you, and let us thank each other. I thank Cardinal Grech and Cardinal Hollerich for the work they have done, the two Secretaries, Nathalie and San Martín – you have done a good job! –, Don Batocchio and Father Costa who helped us so much! I thank all those who worked behind the scenes and without them this wouldn’t have been possible. Thank you very much! May the Lord bless you. Let us pray for each other. Thank you!
