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BOLLETTINO

HOLY SEE PRESS OFFICE BUREAU DE PRESSE DU SAINT-SIÈGE PRESSEAMT DES HEILIGEN STUHLIS
OFICINA DE PRENSA DE LA SANTA SEDE SALA DE IMPRENSA DA SANTA SÉ
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N. 241125k

Monday 25.11.2024

Note of the Holy Father Francis to accompany the Final Document of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

At the various moments along the Synod path initiated by myself in October 2021, we have listened to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the Church at this time.

The *Final Document* of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops gathers the fruit of a journey shaped by listening to the People of God and by the discernment of the Pastors. Letting herself be enlightened by the Holy Spirit, the entire Church has been called to interpret her experience and identify the steps to be taken to live communion, achieving participation and promoting the mission that Jesus Christ has entrusted to her. The synodal path, undertaken in the local Churches, then went through the national and continental phases, leading to the celebration of the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in the two sessions of October 2023 and October 2024. Now the journey continues in the local Churches and their groupings, treasuring the *Final Document* that was voted on and approved by the Assembly in all its parts on 26 October. I too approved it and, signing it, ordered its publication, joining the “we” of the Assembly which, through the *Final Document*, addresses the holy faithful People of God.

Acknowledging the value of the synodal journey completed, I now hand over to the whole Church the indications contained in the *Final Document*, as a restitution of what has matured during these years, through listening and discernment, and as an authoritative guide for her life and mission.

The *Final Document* will form part of the ordinary Magisterium of the Successor of Peter (cf. *EC* 18 § 1; CCC 892), and as such I ask that it be accepted. It represents a form of exercise of the authentic teaching of the Bishop of Rome, with some novel features but which in fact corresponds to what I had the opportunity to point out on 17 October 2015, when I stated that synodality is the appropriate interpretative framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry.

In approving the *Document*, last 26 October, I said that it was not strictly normative and that its application would require several forms of mediation. This does not mean that it does not commit the Churches as of now to make decisions coherent with its indications. The local Churches and Church groupings are now required to implement, in the various contexts, the authoritative indications contained in the *Document*, through processes

of discernment and decision-making envisaged by law and by the Document itself. I also added that time would be needed to reach choices involving the Church as a whole: this is particularly true for the topics entrusted to the ten study groups, to which others may be added, in view of the necessary decisions. The conclusion of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops does not put an end to the synodal process.

I resume here with conviction what I indicated at the end of the articulated synodal path that led to the promulgation of *Amoris Laetitia* (19 March 2016): “Not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium. Unity of teaching and practice is certainly necessary in the Church, but this does not preclude various ways of interpreting some aspects of that teaching or drawing certain consequences from it. This will always be the case as the Spirit guides us towards the entire truth (cf. *Jn* 16:13), until he leads us fully into the mystery of Christ and enables us to see all things as he does. Each country or region, moreover, can seek solutions better suited to its culture and sensitive to its traditions and local needs” (*AL* 3).

The *Final Document* also contains indications that, in the light of its basic orientations, can already now be implemented in the local Churches and groupings of Churches, taking into account the different contexts, what has already been done and what remains to be done to learn and develop ever better the style proper to the missionary synodal Church.

In many cases, it is a matter of effectively implementing what is already provided for by existing law, both Latin and Eastern. In other cases, it will be possible to proceed, through a synodal discernment and within the framework of the possibilities indicated by the Final Document, to the creative activation of new forms of ministeriality and missionary action, experimenting and subjecting experiences to verification. In the report envisaged for the *ad limina* visit, each bishop shall take care to report what choices have been made in the local Church entrusted to him in relation to what is indicated in the *Final Document*, what difficulties have been encountered, and what the results have been.

The task of accompanying the “implementation phase” of the synodal journey, at the basis of the guidelines offered by the *Final Document*, is entrusted to the General Secretariat of the Synod together with the Dicasteries of the Roman Curia (cf. *EC* 19-21).

The synodal path of the Catholic Church, inspired also by the desire to continue the journey towards full and visible Christian unity, “now needs its shared words to be accompanied by actions” (*Final Greeting to the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, 26 October 2024). May the Holy Spirit, gift of the Risen One, sustain and guide the entire Church in this journey. May He, who is harmony, continue to rejuvenate the Church with the strength of the Gospel, renew her and lead her to perfect union with her Spouse (cf. *LG* 4). For the Spirit and the Bride say to the Lord Jesus: “Come” (cf. *Rev* 22:17).

24 November 2024

Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe

Francis
