

For a Synodal Church. An integral experience

The characteristic signs of a Synodal Church and conversation in the Spirit

In the two years since the opening of the synodal process 2021-2024 (10 October 2021), the People of God across the world have been presented with the basic, guiding question: "How does this 'journeying together', which takes place today on different levels (from the local level to the universal one), allow the Church to proclaim the Gospel in accordance with the mission entrusted to Her; and what steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow as a synodal Church?" (Preparatory Document, no. 2). The People of God have experienced this "journeying together" and from the re-reading of this experience a series of characteristic signs of a synodal Church have emerged, which have been collected in Section A of the Instrumentum laboris (IL).

a) Joy is the spiritual sentiment that accompanies the experience of "journeying together": "We have experienced the joy expressed in the sincere and respectful encounter between brothers and sisters in the faith: to meet each other is to encounter the Lord who is in our midst!" (IL, no. 6).

b) In this atmosphere of joy, the synodal process has become the 'place' where an extraordinary variety of charisms, ministries and ecclesial vocations, as well as different languages, cultures, liturgical and theological traditions, of which the Church is the bearer, has been manifested.

c) The reality that all members of the People of God share in common is the fulcrum around which differences find their principle of unity: the dignity that comes from Baptism, which makes those who receive it children of God, brothers and sisters in Christ. By virtue of Baptism, each member of the People of God is a fully-fledged subject of the common mission of proclaiming the Gospel. In the particularity of their vocation, each is empowered to offer his or her irreplaceable contribution, manifesting the charisms they have received through the ministry they exercise. In this way, the People of God once again becomes a fully-fledged subject of ecclesial life insofar as all the baptised share in Christ's priestly, prophetic and kingly function (cf. LG, no. 10).

d) The experience of synodal meetings has led to an appreciation of listening as a principle of the synodal Church, and the willingness to listen has been recognised as a necessary attitude for our maturation in a synodal style and form of Church. The desire for encounter and dialogue with those with whom we share the same Baptism has been expressed with enthusiasm.

e) The synodal path has enabled the Church to experience first-hand the ways that differences can be perceived as sources of division and polarisation. The multiplicity of motivations and tensions that run through the ecclesial body, if welcomed with respect for the other, can represent a constructive challenge to rebuild communion and a way to accomplish the Church's mission together without lapsing into sterile oppositions. This is why a synodal Church is a Church of discernment.

f) The synodal journey has also put us in touch with "the healthy restlessness of incompleteness", which can be a gift and should not necessarily be perceived as a problem (IL, no. 29). A synodal Church is aware that She is facing the inexhaustible and holy mystery of God.

g) In this same vein, many local Churches have highlighted the fruitfulness of conversation in the Spirit as a method and instrument that, taking its starting point from listening to the Word of God, enables the encounter between brothers and sisters. The attention to each person's word and the expression of the resonances it arouses open mutual acceptance to listening to the voice of the Spirit. This enables us to understand the steps we need to take to continue "journeying together".

h) The liturgy, in particular the Eucharist, is the nourishment and inspiration for a

synodal Church. It is the space in which we experience the meeting of brothers and sisters summoned by the Father, the Son and the Spirit around the one table, in a choral action in which the variety of vocations, charisms and ministries finds a harmony which is not uniformity. The liturgy casts the Church towards the eschatological horizon of communion definitively accomplished, which is the destination towards which we walk together.



Question for discernment

Starting from the journey of the local Churches to which we each belong and from the contents of the *Instrumentum laboris*, which distinctive signs of a synodal Church emerge with greater clarity and which deserve greater recognition or should be particularly highlighted or deepened?

Suggestions for prayer and preparatory reflection

1) Reflecting on how the synod course unfolded in the Church where I come from, what is the prevailing spiritual tone that characterises it? What emotions and feelings did it arouse in those who took part? What desires did it arouse in the Christian community? What concerns emerged?

2) How can we grow in a synodal style of liturgical celebration, which highlights the distinctive contribution of all participants, starting from the variety of vocations, charisms and ministries they bear?

3) In my local Church, how have we used and adapted the method of conversation in the Spirit? What are the main fruits it has enabled us to reap? How can it continue to help us grow as a missionary synodal Church?

4) What have we learned about listening as a characteristic of a synodal Church? What resources have we discovered we possess in this regard? Where do we perceive shortcomings? What do we need to address them? How can the ability to listen become an increasingly recognised and recognisable feature of our communities?

5) "A synodal Church promotes the passage from 'I' to 'we'" (IL, no. 25). How has the synodal process promoted the cohesion of the local Church where I come from? How has it helped us to experience "the spiritual savour of being a people" (cf. *Evangelii gaudium*, nos. 268-274)? How do we feel we can grow in this dimension?

6) Did we meet with members of other Churches or ecclesial communities during the synod journey? Did we meet with believers from other religions? What was the spiritual tone of these meetings? What did we learn in order to grow in our desire and ability to walk together with them?

7) In my local Church, which tensions have emerged most strongly? How did we try to manage them so they did not become explosive? How do we evaluate this experience? What have we learned from this to help us grow in the ability to manage tensions without being crushed by them, which is proper to a synodal Church?

8) What experiences of discernment in common have we had in my local Church context? What have they enabled us to discover? In what direction do we need to continue growing?