



**MESSAGE OF THE SUPERIOR GENERAL
ABOUT THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS ON THE YOUNG,
FAITH AND VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT**

“A LISTENING CHURCH AND JOURNEYING WITH THE YOUNG”

Dear Brothers,

Sunday 28 October 2018, with the solemn Eucharistic Celebration presided by Pope Francis, ended the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, which had as its theme, “Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment”. It seems to me that any effort to summarize the Final Document, easily accessible in the digital version, will always be partial because of the many contents and particularities that it brings with it. In its entirety, it is the main reference in which everyone can find, in complete form, the contents on which the Synod has reflected and the proposals to the entire ecclesial community regarding the world of the youth and some of its connected realities. My objective here is only to underline some aspects, which I consider important after the closing of this ecclesial event to which I have had the grace to participate.

About 350 people were present at the Synod that included bishops, priests, religious, lay people and experts, men and women from five continents coming from the most diverse cultural, social and ecclesial contexts and with different sensitivities regarding the world of the youth. Everything took place in an atmosphere of openness, hoped and desired by Pope Francis, President of the Synod. So, from the very beginning, we breathed an air of freedom of expression, respect, cordiality and joy even in the face of the diversity of opinions and ideas that were gradually being manifested. The presence of the Holy Father, especially during the works in the assembly, and his simple way of relating to everyone – even with those who, in his free time, approached him – has helped a lot to create a relaxed atmosphere.

The words of Pope Francis in the homily given at the opening Mass of the Synod on 3 October were illuminating, in which he invited the participants (as well as the whole Church) to ask the help of the Spirit to revive that evangelical ardour and passion, which in turn generate ardour and passion for Jesus and which reawaken and renew the ability to dream and hope, two attitudes closely related to the world of the youth.

In this same homily, Pope Francis exhorted the participants to face with hope the work that the Synod was going to deal with on the world of the youth: *«Anointed by hope, let us begin a new ecclesial meeting. One that can broaden our horizons, expand our hearts and transform those frames of mind that today paralyze, separate and alienate us from young people, leaving them exposed to stormy seas, orphans without a faith community*

that should sustain them, orphans devoid of a sense of direction and meaning in life (cfr. EG, 49). Hope challenges us, moves us and shatters that conformism which says, “it’s always been done like this”. Hope asks us to get up and look directly into the eyes of young people and see their situations. This same hope asks us to make efforts to reverse situations of uncertainty, exclusion and violence, to which our young people are exposed».

But what “young people” was being talked about? The Synod was aware that «*all young people, no one excluded, are in the heart of God and therefore also in the heart of the Church*». All young people, therefore: those who already belong to the communities of faith, that is, to parishes and ecclesial communities and, in this context, even those who feel called to religious and priestly life; but also, and with special care, those who, regardless of their faith, seek a meaning for their lives, young migrants, the unemployed, those with disabilities or suffering from diseases. Young people, victims of violence, abuse or different forms of addiction. Finally, everyone feels victims of what the Pope calls “*the throw away culture*”.

The presence of 34 young people at the Synod, not only as simple auditors but also with their interventions at the plenary and in the work of the linguistic groups, was a strong call to listen to them and to give “concrete answers” to their questions and to the different situations in which they live. At the Synod, it was clear that the Church must face the different realities of the young and, in the footsteps of Jesus, give answers, helping the young to “discern” their choices, mainly the fundamental ones that decide their future.

In addition to the aspects directly related to the world of the youth and its relationship with the Church, the methodology with which the Synod developed (also considering its entire preparation phase) showed us that it is possible to “journey together”. As stated in the Final Document: «*The lived experience made the Synod participants aware of the importance of a synodal form of the Church for the proclamation and transmission of the faith. The participation of young people has helped to “awaken” synodality, which is a “constitutive dimension of the Church”*».

In this perspective, we have spoken of synodality for the mission, or more precisely of “missionary synodality”, a term to be deepened so that it would become a collegial method also for our Chapters and Assemblies, as for every form of communitarian forum in which we take fundamental decisions for our life and mission. In this climate of synodality, I also had a space of time to do an intervention in the assembly, with which I tried to reflect on a central theme in the light of our charism, more specifically on the presence of the young in the digital environment, which content has already been published.

The Synod, as an event, is over. Now it begins for the whole Church, and of course for us Paulines and for the whole Pauline Family (because we cannot feel like a satellite orbiting around itself...), the phase of deepening and implementing the proposals present in the Final Document. In light of all that has been discussed, we must also ask ourselves some questions, and among these I propose the following: to what extent today we Paulines really open ourselves to the world of the youth? To what extent do we glimpse this reality in the light of the signs of the times? What quality do our contacts with young people have? Are we sensitive to the different situations

in which they are found? What do we do concretely for them in our editorial apostolate, for example with our printed publications and in the digital environment?

We can also ask other questions regarding specifically the vocational sphere of our mission: what value do we give to the pastoral care of vocations? How do we present to young people the proposal of our charism and how do we form young people who are already in our formation houses? Do we listen to them? What is the level of our testimony before them?

The Vocation Year, which we will celebrate as Pauline Family from 25 January 2019 to 25 January 2020 will undoubtedly be a good opportunity to deepen our vocation and to raise awareness about the pastoral care of vocations, which is one of our priorities. Also the realization, in November of the next year, of the *2nd International Seminar on Formation for the Mission* will be a propitious time to put into practice many beautiful ideas that this Synod offered us. For now, I ask all the Superiors of Circumscriptions who, with their Councils, give animation through the reading and reflection of the Final Document of the Synod, involving in this work also the Coordinators General of Formation and their Teams.

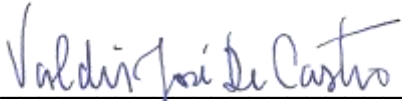
It is reaffirmed in this Synod that we are called, as a Church, not only to offer “contents” to young people, but above all to help them find Jesus, so that they may also be protagonists of evangelization. Therefore, it is not surprising that the three parts of the Final Document are illuminated by the paradigmatic passage of the Gospel of Luke on the disciples of Emmaus.

Let us open to young people the doors of the heart and of the communities, not only to give them guidelines, but also to listen and welcome their suggestions, so that we can rejuvenate the Church. With regard to our Congregation and the Pauline Family, the wish and hope is that we can really help them to discover Jesus, who for us is the Master, Way, Truth and Life, and to be protagonists in evangelization, in the spirit of the Apostle Paul, in the culture of communication!

I end my message by recalling the Synod’s insistence on the dimension of personal and community witnessing, an indispensable condition for attracting young people. The final part of the Final Document speaks rightly of holiness as a way of life, as a concrete form of witnessing to Jesus: *«We must be holy to be able to invite young people to become one. Young people have clamoured for an authentic, luminous, transparent, joyful Church: only a Church of the saints can live up to these requests! Many of them have left it because they have not found sanctity, but mediocrity, presumption, division and corruption»*. We ourselves can give a witnessing of a Church – and of a Congregation and of the same Pauline Family – increasingly enlightened by the Gospel!

Faternally.

Rome, 1st November 2018
Solemnity of All Saints


Father Valdir José De Castro
Superior General