

## From the Address at the Opening of the Synod on Young People

# Spending Time With The Future

### Papa Francesco

*Words imbued with profound significance can have such powerful effects on us that we fail to adequately consider how to live them in our lives. A case in point is the word, 'synodality'. What does it really mean? What does it ask of us? And how is it accomplished? We seem to take it all for granted. But, in reality, everything is still waiting to be discovered! We found one answer in Pope Francis' opening address to the Synod on Young People. Here are excerpts of his address which propose, beyond the Synod event itself, a characteristic way of being church today.*

[...]

[I]t is [...] worth the effort to have the Church as a mother, as a teacher, as a home, as a family, and, despite human weaknesses and difficulties, capable of radiating and conveying Christ's timeless message; worth the effort to hold onto the boat of the Church which, despite the world's cruel storms, continues to offer shelter and hospitality to everyone; worth the effort to listen to one another; worth the effort to swim against the tide and be bound by lofty values: family, fidelity, love, faith, sacrifice, service, eternal life. [...]

*The Synod we are living is a moment of sharing.* I wish, therefore, at the beginning of the Synod Assembly, to invite everyone to speak with courage and frankness (*parrhesia*), namely to integrate freedom, truth and charity. Only dialogue can help us grow. An honest, transparent critique is constructive and helpful, and does not engage in useless chatter, rumours, conjectures or prejudices.

*And humility in listening must correspond to courage in speaking.* [I told the young people in the pre-Synod Meeting](#): "If you say something I do not like, I have to listen even more, because everyone has the right to be heard, just as everyone has the right to speak". [...]

*The Synod must be an exercise in dialogue, above all among those of you participating.* The first fruit of this dialogue is that everyone is open to newness, to change their opinions thanks to what they have heard from others. [...] Let us feel free to welcome and understand others and therefore to change our convictions and positions: this is a sign of great human and spiritual maturity.

*The Synod is an ecclesial exercise in discernment* [...]. Discernment is the method and at the same time the goal we set ourselves: it is based on the conviction that God is at work in world history, in life's events, in the people I meet and who speak to me. For this reason, we are called to listen to what the Spirit suggests to us, with methods and in paths that are often unpredictable. [...]

*We are a sign of a Church that listens and journeys.* [...] This Synod has the opportunity, the task and the duty to be a sign of a Church that really listens, that allows herself to be questioned by the experiences of those she meets, and who does not always have a ready-made answer. A Church that does not listen shows herself closed to newness, closed to God's surprises, and cannot be credible, especially for the young who will inevitably turn away rather than approach.

*Let us leave behind prejudice and stereotypes [...]:* When we think we already know who others are and what they want, we really struggle to listen to them seriously. Relations across generations are a terrain in which prejudice and stereotypes take root with proverbial ease, so much so that we are often oblivious to it. Young people are tempted to consider adults outdated; adults are tempted to regard young people as inexperienced, to know how they are and especially how they should be and behave. All of this can be an overwhelming obstacle to dialogue and to the encounter between generations. [...]

If we can avoid this risk, then we will help to bridge generations. Adults should overcome the temptation to underestimate the abilities of young people and not judge them negatively. [...] Young people, on the other hand, should overcome the temptation to ignore adults and to consider the elderly “archaic, outdated and boring”, forgetting that it is foolish always to start from scratch as if life began only with each of them. Despite their physical frailty, the elderly are always the memory of mankind, the roots of our society, the “pulse” of our civilization. To spurn them, reject them, isolate or snub them is to yield to a worldly mentality that is devouring our homes from within. To neglect the rich experiences that each generation inherits and transmits to the next is an act of self-destruction.

*It is therefore necessary, on the one hand, to decisively overcome the scourge of clericalism [...]* to which an assembly such as this is inevitably exposed, despite our intentions. Clericalism arises from an elitist and exclusivist vision of vocation, that interprets the ministry received as a *power* to be exercised rather than as a free and generous *service* to be given. This leads us to believe that we belong to a group that has all the answers and no longer needs to listen or learn anything, or that pretends to listen. *Clericalism is a perversion and is the root of many evils in the Church:* we must humbly ask forgiveness for this and above all create the conditions so that it is not repeated.

*We must, on the other hand, cure the virus of self-sufficiency* and of hasty conclusions reached by many young people. An Egyptian proverb goes: “If there is no elderly person in your home, buy one, because you will need him”. [...]

The present moment, and this applies also to the Church, appears to be laden with struggles, problems, burdens. But our faith tells us that it is also the *kairos* in which the Lord comes to meet us in order to love us and call us to the fullness of life. The future is not a threat to be feared, but is the time the Lord promises us when we will be able to experience communion with him, with our brothers and sisters, and with the whole of creation. [...]

Let us therefore work to “spend time with the future”, to take from this Synod not merely a document – that generally is only read by a few and criticized by many – but above all concrete pastoral proposals capable of fulfilling the Synod’s purpose. In other words, *to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another, and create a bright resourcefulness* that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands, and inspire in young people – all young people, with no one excluded – a vision of the future filled with the joy of the Gospel.