

Synod on Synodality

"Enlarge the space of your tent!" (Is 54:2)

I. Putting the phrase into context

3 stages on the Synod

1. Local consultation - oct 2021 worldwide opening of the synodal process

May - august 2022 - digital consultation in the social media networks - Project "the Church listens to you."

2. Dialogue among churches of the specific regions

15 August 2022 - deadline of submission for the syntheses

27 oct 2022 - publication of documents for continental stage (DCS)

Jan-march 2023 - 7 continental synodal assemblies

3. General Assemblies. March 31, 2023 - deadline, submission of final document of 7 continental assemblies

June 2023 - instrumentum laboris

4-29 oct 2023 - 1st session, 16th general assemblies, synod of bishops

Oct 2024 - 2nd session, 16th general assemblies, synod of bishops

2025 - d church continues to implement her synodal dimension

The working document for continental stage (DCS) carries with it an OT biblical text as its theme the text from Isaiah 54:2 and presents a biblical icon "enlarge the space of ur tent." This is on the second chapter entitled "Listening to the Scriptures."

II. The Biblical Text

1. The 2nd chapter presents a biblical icon, the image of the tent with which chapter 54 of the book of Isaiah opens in verse 2. This image and narrative represents a key to an interpretation of the contents within the DCS in the light of the Word, placing them in the arc of God's promise that becomes a vocation for his people and his church: "Enlarge the space of your tent."

The text is to a people living the experience of exile that the prophets addresses words that help us today to focus on what the Lord is calling us through the experience of lived synodality: "Enlarge the space of your tent, spread out your tent cloths unsparingly, lengthen your ropes and make firm your pegs." (Is 54:2)

To the people in exile the prophet's words evokes the experience of the exodus, when they dwelt in tents, and announces the promise of the return to the land, a sign of joy and hope. To prepare, it is necessary to enlarge the tent, acting on the three elements of its structure:

a) the first is the TENT CLOTH, which protects from the sun, wind and rain, delineating a space of life and conviviality. They need to be spread out, so that they can also protect those who are still outside this space, but who feel called to enter it.

b) The ROPES that hold the cloths together are the second structural element of the tent. They must balance the tension needed to keep the tent from drooping with the softness that cushions movement caused by the wind. That is why if the tent expands, the ropes must be stretched to maintain the right tension.

c) finally, the PEGS are the third element: they anchor the structure to the ground and ensure its solidity, but remain capable of moving when the tent must be pitched elsewhere.

III. Meaning of Symbols

1. The text invites us to imagine the church as a tent, indeed, as a tent of meeting, which accompanied the people on their journey through the desert: called to stretch out, therefore, but also to move: moving and stretching so as to welcome and accommodate more. Indeed, the Church as a mother, opens her hands to welcome and embrace all who may accept Christ.

This tent is a space of communion, a place of participation and a foundation for mission.

2. At the center of this tent stands the tabernacle, i.e., the presence of the Lord. The tent hold is ensured by the sturdiness of its pegs, i.e., the fundamentals of faith that do not change but can be moved and planted in ever new ground, so that the tent can accompany the people as they walk through history. The Church "changes" so as to remain the same, that is, her very nature adopts to the circumstances and remains relevant.

3. Finally, the ropes: in order not to sag, the structure of the tent must keep in balance the different forces and tensions to which it is subjected: a metaphor that expresses the need for discernment.

IV. Pointers for Reflection

1. Enlarging the tent requires welcoming others into it, making room for their diversity. Key concept: heterogeneous dwelling.

The image of the Church: an expansive, but not homogeneous dwelling, capable of sheltering all, but open, letting in and out (Jn 10:9), and moving toward embracing the Father and all of humanity.

2. Matthew 22:9-10 gives us a picture of king's banquet where those invited refuse to come and the king instructed his servants to go into the streets and alleys to invite as many as they can find into the wedding. Note the heterogeneity of the guests. Both the good and the bad were invited. Every guest, however, are expected to wear the wedding clothes.

This may entail the absence of any form of discrimination, pointing to the universality of salvation in Christ, but always taking into consideration the need for metanoia among those "inside the tent."

3. All-embracing. Christ embraced the sinners, he welcomed the poor and the needy, he saved Mary Magdalene, and he brought back to life the dead son, the only son of a widow. Jesus was all-embracing, he was expansive, his love is well-stretched.

He was indeed so expansive that extended himself even towards the Gentiles. He helped the pagan centurion's slave, he saved the Gadarene demoniac, he elevated the dignity of the Samaritan woman and healed the the Canaanite daughter. No one is discriminated upon, everyone is accepted. It was always a tent enlarged.

His final instruction prior to his ascension was "go to the whole world and preach the gospel; baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Evangelization and mission would always bring towards the "enlargement" of this tent, the Church.

4. "'Lord, if you are willing, you can heal me.' Jesus said, 'I do will it, be cleansed!.'" This text in Matthew 8:2 brings us into the very heart of Jesus. The leprous approached Jesus with this request and He was never disappointed.

We have a "yes" Lord in Christ. He would not refuse anyone. Jesus always welcomes. He is always ready to give and to help. The same attitude should be put on among us and we will surely find a "tent truly enlarged."

5. The document quotes Jn 12:24 - of the grain falling into the ground that dies as a seed but sprouts into tiny plant which will soon become a tree that will bear much fruit.

We cannot enlarge this tent, unless there is dying, and not without sacrifice. Christianity is revolutionary in a sense that it teaches pain in order to achieve gain. It is so radical that it centers on the cross so as to reach for the crown. It is truly an amazement that it directs its followers (that's us, who else!?) towards the thorns in order to discover the throne.

All this are hard to digest, unless one ingredient is added. And that is love. It is love as Jesus taught us, love as we saw in the Lord. Agape love. It is a love that seeks the good of all even towards its own destruction.

6. The DCS speaks of dying but paradoxically it is speaking of fruitfulness. This is the life of Christ. And ideally we are committed to follow. Christ was the seed that dies, and from that death, life blossoms for us. It is one death that bring so much to many lives. By and through it, the Church blossoms. It was an enlargement of the tent

Amen, amen, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains just a grain of wheat; but if it dies, it produces much fruit" (Jn. 12:24).

The fruitfulness of the church depends on accepting this death, which is not however, an annihilation, but an experience of emptying oneself in order to be filled by Christ through the Holy Spirit, and thus a process by which we receive richer relationships, deeper ties to God and each other.

7. The enlargement of this tent points to the very content of the Lord's heart: compassion. "When He saw the crowds, he was moved with pity, for they were like sheep without a shepherd" (Mt 9:36).

How can we enlarge this tent with a heart that is indifferent? Love and compassion is at the very core of His person: his preaching, healing, exorcizing happened because he took pity on them for they were like sheep without a shepherd.

The self-emptying of Christ comes as a consequence of this compassion. He became nothing that we may become something. He became sin that we who are sinful, might become justified.

We see in this document from Pope Francis' effort on synodality, this enlargement of tent, this space being expanded so as to receive more and all - it is so Christ-like!