SECRETARIA GENERALIS
SYNODI

Vatican, 12 September 2023

Prot. No. 230382

Dear brothers in the episcopate,

"The People of God have been on the move since Pope Francis convened the whole Church in Synod in October 2021" (*Instrumentum laboris*, 1), and now we have reached another milestone in this process that began with the consultation of the People of God. In a few days, on October 4, the Holy Father will open the first session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, "For a Synodal Church. Communion, Participation, Mission."

"Without prayer there will be no Synod" (Pope Francis, *Prayer Intention for the month of October 2022*). The Synod is, above all, an event of prayer and listening that involves not only the members of the Synodal Assembly, but every baptized person and every particular Church. Indeed, all of us are called at this time to unite in communion of prayer and insistent invocation of the Holy Spirit to guide us in discerning what the Lord is asking of his Church today. Therefore, I write to you, who are "the visible principle and foundation of unity" (LG 23) in your particular Churches and the first animators of prayer for the portion of God's people entrusted to you so that, from the whole Church "an unceasing prayer" (Acts 12:5) may ascend to God for the Holy Father, Pope Francis and for all the members of the Synodal Assembly. I ask you, therefore, to pray for the Synod and to urge unanimous and unceasing prayer from every Christian community in your Particular Church, especially the monastic communities. Prayer is one of the forms of participation proper to every bishop in collegial action and an eminent sign of solicitude for the universal Church (cf. *Apostolorum successores*, 13).

The different forms of prayer are but the multi-dimensional expressions of the Church's synodal life. First and foremost, **prayer is listening**. In opening the synodal journey, the Holy Father said, "The Synod then offers us the opportunity to become a listening Church, to break out of our routine and pause from our pastoral concerns in order to stop and listen." (*Moment of Reflection*, Rome, Oct. 9, 2021). The first step in prayer is listening to the Word of God, listening to the Spirit. Therefore, the first contribution of every baptized person to the unfolding of the Synod Assembly will be listening to the Word of God and the Spirit in the conviction that the voice of the Spirit is the *sine qua non* for ecclesial discernment.

TO ALL BISHOPS

(*with 4 annexes*)

Via della Conciliazione, 34 – 00120 Città del Vaticano
Tel.: (+39) 06.698.84324/84821 – Fax: (+39) 06.698.83392
E-mail: synodus@synod.va – https://www.synod.va

The second form, or face, of **prayer is adoration**. The Holy Father said, "Today how much we miss the prayer of adoration; so many people have lost not only the habit but also the very notion of what it means to worship God!" (Rome, Oct. 9, 2021). Listening, then, must be followed by adoring silence in awe for what God is saying to his Church and for what the Spirit arouses in in the Church today. The synodal path traversed so far leads us to wonder and awe, to the conversion of our gaze from the sadness of resignation (cf. Lk 24:17) to the joyful mission of those who have discovered the presence of the Risen One in their midst (cf. Lk 24:33).

The third face of **prayer is intercession**. We must believe in the efficacy of intercessory prayer, which is not about bending God's will to ours. Rather, intercession is about asking the Lord to enlighten our hearts with the power of his life-giving Spirit so that we might discern and do his will. "To intercede" also means to assume responsibility, to declare before God our participation and our involvement. "To intercede" means to say, "I'm interested, I'm in, it belongs to me." To intercede for the Synod Assembly, for all its members and, first and foremost, for the Holy Father who so often asks us to pray for him, is to engage the highest form of participation.

Finally, dear brothers, **prayer is thanksgiving**, recognizing the primacy of God's action and grace in all our works and in the life of the Christian community. The Holy Father said, "The prayer of thanksgiving always begins from here: from the recognition that grace precedes us. We were thought of before we learned how to think; we were loved before we learned how to love; we were desired before our hearts conceived a desire." (*General Audience*, Dec. 30, 2020). The prayer of thanksgiving is a true "therapy" that moves us from our withdrawal into ourselves to the openness that is able to discover all that God continues to work in his Church.

Dear Brothers, with the prayer of listening, adoration, intercession and thanksgiving, the whole ecclesial community will be present, in the power of the Spirit, at the Synodal Assembly as an event that concerns all the baptized. I invite you to emphasize prayer for the Synodal Assembly especially on October 1, XXVI Sunday of Ordinary Time (Year A), remembering it in the homily, the Universal Prayers, and in the final blessing of the Eucharistic celebration. For this purpose, I attach some texts that can be used for the Universal Prayers and the final blessing.

With gratitude to you for your solicitude in guiding your particular Churches on the synodal journey, and to the Lord for the gifts of communion and joyful hope that he makes flourish on our ecclesial journey, be assured of my prayers for you and for your ministry on behalf of the whole Church. May the Spirit of the Lord enlighten us and lead us always in the way of his will, for it is only his Word that makes us live (cf. Ps. 119:50) and in which we find our joy.

Fraternally,

Mario Card. GRECH
General Secretary