

Faith and action

A synodal way for the world.

In his encyclical *Laudato si'* Pope Francis, in a certain way, anticipated what we are living in the whole world at this moment. With no exceptions, the virus comes into every country and every home, just as the effects of globalisation come into every home. I cannot avoid thinking of the song of a Flemish singer Willem Vermandere, who reminds us of the fact that throughout the world the same products are sold and used: local food is rare and meat comes from New Zealand, while Bangladesh makes clothes for the whole world, Chinese facemasks have to prevent us from sickness. The most evident effect of globalisation is this virus, no one escapes from it. The big question now is not 'which vaccine will free us from such outbreaks in the future?', rather, it will be 'how are we going to organise life on earth in the future?' Which will be the leading forces, be it technology, commerce and production, competition, or nationalism that closes borders? I believe this is also a theological question. We are confronted with the reality that the whole universe and all people have come into being through the one and unique act of the Creator.

I would like to suggest to the world what Pope Francis outlined during the synod on the family in 2015. To build a common home for everybody, poor and rich, east or west, young or old, healthy or ill, he suggests the synodal way. He made it clear that there are two fundamental requirements to change the world: first of all, listening (and this is more than just hearing) and then walking together. A big changeover has taken place in the reflection of the Church over the last years. The adage, See – Judge – Act as a methodology for reflection has been developed into, 'listen carefully – verify if what you heard is conformed with the reality – and finally, accompany'. The word 'judge' has been dropped. Who am I to judge or condemn? That was the Pope's answer to the journalist when asked about the situation of same-sex marriages.

A synodal way starts from the bottom, at the grassroots. It is there we direct our ears to listen and we will 'hear the cry of our people'. While accompanying the people to where they desire to go, we can understand them better and, eventually, steer gently to avoid pitfalls. Let us imagine a social group, a trade union or a school board, and let them use the system of listening, understanding and accompanying. Imagine a parish priest doing the same, or even a minister of the government, not to mention presidents and kings in their meetings. How would the world be if worldwide all the producers of cosmetics would join, coming together as one brand, following the same strategy and commercial appeals? In western countries, the governments insist on the fusion of schools and hospitals, for financial reasons. Some commercial business enterprises seem to be doing it as well. Is that meant to serve the people better, and is it based on a thorough consultation with the grassroots? I often think of the poor migrants from Syria who, after a long period of suffering, were brought to Belgium through a Church guided corridor. How did they feel upon entering the airport and seeing the glitter in the luxury shops. If it is for the good of the people of the same country, why can political parties not arrive at a common strategy to alleviate the growing poverty of the people. Are parliamentarians not elected to serve their people? In order to reach that goal, what is needed is to step away from the mentality of 'Me Too', or even 'Me First'. What was the mentality of the priest and the Levite in the new testament that walked by in indifference while they saw the wounded man on the roadside? The question of the pharisee 'who is my neighbour' is more pertinent now than ever. There is certainly no reason to put the fault of international disasters in the shoes of one or the other political party, or one or the other religious group or belief. We are all deeply concerned.

Walk together from the beginning, starting from the bottom-up, that is the fundamental mission humankind has received from the Creator. No one can say that he or she is not responsible for his or

her brother and sister. He who walks together will experience the particularity of each person, understanding and trying to give a concrete expression to love. How often do we have to insist that every person is equal, that man and women, young and old have equal rights?

When Pope Francis, during the synod, spoke of how the Church should go the way of synodality, he means to say that whoever is in power in this world should learn from what Jesus taught and lived: He invited the two sons of Zebedee to come and stay with him immediately after just meeting them. Sharing one's own life is the clearest way to tell anybody that we are brothers and sisters.

Let me conclude with this quote from *Laudato si'*:

'Today, in view of the common good, there is an urgent need for politics and economics to enter into a frank dialogue in the service of life, especially human life. Saving banks at any cost, making the public pay the price, foregoing a firm commitment to reviewing and reforming the entire system, only reaffirms the absolute power of a financial system, a power which has no future and will only give rise to new crises after a slow, costly and only apparent recovery'. (L.S. 189).

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