

Homily of Pope Francis during the opening Mass of the Synod of Bishops



“The Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things, and bring to remembrance all that I have said to you” (*Jn 14:26*).

In this straightforward way, Jesus offers his disciples the assurance that will accompany all the missionary work to be entrusted to them: the Holy Spirit will be the first to preserve, to keep alive and relevant, the memory of the Lord in the heart of his disciples. It is the Spirit who ensures that the richness and beauty of the Gospel will be a source of constant joy and freshness.

At the start of this moment of grace for the whole Church, and following God’s word, we ask the Paraclete to help us preserve the memory of the Lord and rekindle in us his words that have made our hearts burn (cf. *Lk 24:32*). A Gospel ardour and passion which lead to an ardour and passion for Jesus. A memory that can rekindle and renew in us the *capacity to dream and to hope*. For we know that our young people will be capable of prophesy and vision to the extent that we, who are already adult or elderly, can dream and thus be infectious in sharing those dreams and hopes that we carry in our hearts (cf. *Joel 2:28*).

May the Spirit grant us the grace to be synodal Fathers anointed with the gift of dreaming and of hoping. We will then, in turn, be able to anoint our young people with the gift of prophesy and vision. May the Spirit give us the grace to be a memory that is diligent, living and effective, that does not allow itself from one generation to the next to be extinguished or crushed by the prophets of doom and misfortune, by our own shortcomings, mistakes and sins. Rather may it be a memory capable of enkindling our hearts and of discerning the ways of the Spirit. With this attitude of docile listening to the voice of the Spirit, we have gathered from all parts of the world. Today, for the first time, we have also with us two bishops from mainland China. We offer them our warm welcome: the communion of the entire Episcopate with the Successor of Peter is yet more visible thanks to their presence.

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 (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, 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.

Having been formed by so many choices taken in the past, young people now call us to join them in facing the present with greater commitment and to work against whatever prevents their lives from growing in a dignified way. They ask us and demand of us a creative dedication, a dynamism which is intelligent, enthusiastic and full of hope. They ask us *not to leave them alone* in the hands of so many pedlars of death who oppress their lives and darken their vision.

This capacity to dream together that our Lord offers the Church today as a gift, requires, as Saint Paul expresses in the first reading, that we cultivate one specific attitude: “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” (*Phil 2:4*). And it requires that we aim even higher, humbly considering others to be better than ourselves (cf. v.3). In this spirit we will try to listen to one another, in order to discern together what the Lord is asking of his Church. And this demands that we be really careful against succumbing to a self-preservation and self-centredness which gives importance to what is secondary yet makes secondary what is important. Love for the Gospel and for the people who have been entrusted to us, challenges us to broaden our horizons and not lose sight of the mission to which we are called. In this way we shall aim for an even greater good that will benefit all of us. Without this disposition, all of our efforts will be in vain.

The gift of that ability to listen, sincerely and prayerfully, as free as possible from prejudice and conditioning, will help us to be part of those situations which the People of God experience. Listening to God, so that with him we can listen to the cry of the people; listening to our people, so that we can breathe in with them the desire to which God calls us (cf. *Address during the Prayer Vigil in preparation for the Synod on the Family*, 4 October 2014).

This disposition protects us from the temptation of falling into moralistic or elitist postures, and it protects us from the lure of abstract ideologies that never touch the realities of our people (cf. J.M. Bergoglio, *Meditations for Religious*, 45-46).

Dear brothers and sisters, let us entrust this time to the maternal protection of Our Lady. May she, the woman who listens and cherishes memories, accompany us in recognizing the signs of the Spirit, so that with a sense of urgency (cf. *Lk 1:39*), with our dreams and hopes, we may accompany and encourage our young people to always continue prophesying.

Dear Synod Fathers,

Many of us were young or taking our first steps in the religious life while the Second Vatican Council was drawing to a close. The final message of the Council Fathers was addressed to the youth of that time. That message which we ourselves heard in our youth will do us much good if we revisit it in our hearts with the help of the poet’s words: “May the man hold fast to what the child has promised” (Friedrich Hölderlin, *Poems*).

This is how the Council Fathers spoke to us: “For four years the Church has been working to rejuvenate her image in order to respond the better to the design of her Founder, the great Living One, the Christ who is eternally young. At the term of this imposing re-examination of life, she now turns to you. It is for you, youth, especially for you that the Church now comes through her council

to enkindle your light, the light which illuminates the future, your future. The Church is anxious that this society that you are going to build up should respect the dignity, the liberty and the rights of individuals. These individuals are you. [...] She trusts [...] that you will express your faith in life and in what gives meaning to life: the certainty of the existence of a good and just God. It is in the name of this God and of His Son, Jesus, that we exhort you to open your hearts to the dimensions of the world, to heed the appeal of your brothers, to place your youthful energies at their service. Fight against all egoism. Refuse to give free course to the instincts of violence and hatred which beget wars and all their train of miseries. Be generous, pure, respectful and sincere, and build in enthusiasm a better world than your elders had" (Paul VI, *Closing of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Address to Young Men and Women of the World*, 8 December 1965).

Dear Synod Fathers, the Church looks to you with confidence and love.

Source: Press Office of the Holy See.

[01528-EN.02] [Original text: Italian]