

REFLECTION

The Beauty of Ecclesial Communion A Reflection on the Synod of Bishops for the Middle East Rome, October 2010



The task before him was great, but only Peter, aided by the prayer of the Mother of God and the entire Church, could gather such a diverse group of bishops and faithful. From Libya to Saudi Arabia, Armenia to Ethiopia, the Holy Father, in the person of Peter, gathered them in love and good order. His desire was to “confirm” his brothers, as Jesus asked him to do. The brothers were indeed confirmed and the Lord would have been pleased.

All Maronite, Melkite, Syriac Catholic, Chaldean, Coptic and Armenian Catholic bishops were present, including their patriarchs. Likewise, there were representatives from the Ukrainian, Ethiopian, Syro Malabar, Syro-Malakar and Latin Churches who also have faithful in the Middle East.

The opening and closing liturgies were a solemn show of unity in diversity as the Holy Father presided and each patriarch and bishop was vested in the tradition of his own Church *sui iuris*. The daily deliberations, attended timely and attentively by the Holy Father, began with the morning prayer of each different Church. The discussions revealed the deep anguish of marginalized Christians, yet also their dynamic and loving presence in the hospitals, universities, schools, health care facilities and other Catholic social services which remain open to all, Muslims, Jews and Christians alike, which continues to make a difference in the lands where they live. Each Synod Father

and observer had five minutes to speak. We listened, everyone had a chance to speak, we learned.

During the two week long Synod, the hard work of forging consensus sometimes revealed our human side showing differences of opinions and approaches dealing with the difficulties Christians face. Nonetheless, the final message and suggestions revealed a spirit of communion and a renewed intention to witness to Christ no matter what the cost, including suffering, humiliation and even death itself.

The Synod gathered 185 bishops along with dozens of lay experts (men and women), priests and religious, Orthodox and Evangelical fraternal observers, Media, as well as guests from the Jewish and Muslim faiths.

The final message of the Synod was one of hope and encouragement, and all who work for peace, justice and dignity will find in it a word of encouragement and appreciation. The final draft of the Synod's Exhortation will be forthcoming after the Holy Father himself reviews all the deliberations of the Synod and can once again, this time not in person, but in writing, "confirm his brothers."

Beyond the written texts, suggestions and decisions, the Synod was a wondrous communion, where the College of Apostles, with Peter as head, once again became "one heart and one soul," as the first Christians of the Middle East were. The friendships formed among the Synod Fathers, with the Synod members, and with the representatives of the Holy See provide a new impetus to continue our common work of charity and pastoral outreach.

The final success of the Synod is still a work in progress. In large part it depends on us. Whether from the Middle East or not, a Latin Catholic, an Eastern Catholic or any person of good will, the Synod makes a difference only if we redouble our efforts to support the Christians of the Middle East who each day witness to Christ by their daily lives. We can support by prayer, financial assistance, visits, and by becoming more aware of what one member of the Synod described as the "heroic daily sacrifices" of loving Christians in the midst of all the troubles of the Middle East.

Our marriages and families can give witness to Christ. Our youth and elders, teachers and all who work for peace and justice and who assist the poor, the sick, the imprisoned, the abused and the marginalized can make a difference. All who are Christians, not in name only, but in every aspect of their lives, can continue the work of Christ who calls us to be the "salt of the earth" and "light of the world."

The prayer of Saint Peter, the Apostles, and the Mother of God is always with us, and the hope of Pope Benedict is that the Christians of the Middle East and all who support them will find that through our common efforts we shall become more and more what Christ Himself wanted, to witness God's saving mercy in the midst of a sometimes merciless world, and to all be one in Him for the good of the Church and as a blessing for the world.

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