

## **Our contribution to the Synod**

Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki, Metropolitan of Poznań, President of the Polish Bishops' Conference, interviewed by Fr. Henryk Zieliński.

### **What is Your Excellency's expectation of the October's synod in the Vatican?**

I am hoping for a spiritual awakening. The synodal consultations have offered us a broader perspective on many issues in the life of the Church. We have had the opportunity to listen to many different voices and this has been an undeniable value of the synodal process so far. We have become familiar with the challenges faced by the Church on different continents and have come to realise their diversity. For one continent the main challenge is poverty, for another it is hospitality, for yet another it is issues of marriage and family life. Arguably, Europe is in the most difficult situation. From what was presented at the summary of the European continental synod in Prague, it is clear that our continent shows the greatest tensions and differences of perspective on how to fulfil the mission of the Church.

### **Can this be a problem?**

It is good to have a true picture of reality so as not to harbour illusions. At the moment, it is crucial to move on to discern which of these proposals are good for the Church and in line with its teachings and which are not. Above all, the theological view of the Church should be revealed during the October synod. Given that the synod is no parliament, in accordance with the provisions of the *Instrumentum Laboris* synodal discernment should be based on a conversation with the Holy Spirit. I hope that the fruit of this discernment will be the acceptance as final conclusions only of what is synodal, that is, what is the unanimous opinion of all and not just the opinion of the majority. What is not the opinion of all should be rejected. This is the first rule of synodality, and this has usually been taken into account.

### **Still, the synodal conclusions are not binding and are mere suggestions for the Holy Father...**

Naturally, however, it is important for the Holy Father to be aware of the issues on which the bishops and lay participants in the synod speak with unanimity and on which there is a lack of unanimity. The second criterion for synodality is fidelity to the teaching of the Second Vatican Council and the advancement of its understanding. However, the question is not to hold the Third Vatican Council or to criticise modernity or antiquity. It is about fidelity to Tradition understood not in a sentimental way, but as a manifestation of a theological and institutional hermeneutics of continuity. We cannot afford to disrupt this continuity or to persist in some fossil. Tradition, as we understand it, is the unchanging substance of the truths of faith and the constant advancement of their content.

### **How does Your Excellency understand the notion of inclusivity, which has emerged on the occasion of the synod?**

In the broadest sense, the inclusiveness we hear about means embracing everyone. The Holy Father himself often talks about this. He underlines that the Church is for everyone. This is a fundamentally Christian attitude, because even earlier St. Paul the Apostle spoke of accepting one another (cf. Rom 15:7) as the role of the Church. Christianity is a religion that has no intention of driving anyone away but wants to attract. However, the problem lies in the precise interpretation of this concept. We agree that it is necessary to help each person on his or her journey to reach the fullness of humanity and then salvation. If, however, inclusiveness were to mean accepting the sinful tendencies that some people notoriously indulge in without

intending to change their conduct, then things get complicated. While we must show mercy to sinners, what are we to do about organised ideological structures which make it part of their agenda to affirm behaviour contrary to the word of God and as such wish to be accepted by the Church? Can this kind of inclusiveness be condoned? After all, it is one thing to have mercy on, for example, a man struggling with his sexual identity, and quite another to expect the Church to accept the LGBTQ+ movement and ideology. The latter would mean not only questioning biblical anthropology and teaching on marriage, but also the very truth of the creation of human beings as male and female.

**The *Instrumentum Laboris* indicates that the synodal discernment must consider the relevant publications, e.g. the exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* with its reference to the communion of people in non-sacramental relationships. Are there reasons to be concerned about the lessons that can be learned from this?**

The synodal reality is ambiguous. So are the voices emerging from different continents. The worst thing would be if these radically different voices were accepted in the conclusions as legitimate and accepted in different countries as binding. This would mean that the one universal Church would become a loose association of many different local or national Churches. This would set in motion an avalanche that could not be stopped. Besides, many of the terms used so far are vague, such as the concept of laicization or de-clericalization.

**However, how are the laity supposed to be co-responsible for the Church if they do not share in the decision-making?**

The clergy in the parishes entrusted to them usually try to take the easier route, eliminating the laity in the decision-making process. This is an easier if outdated procedure. We need a permanent presence of the laity in all pastoral and economic councils and decision-making bodies. However, it happens that the laity themselves avoid such participation because they do not want to waste their own time. On the other hand, I don't think we should move towards a German model, where the church council decides everything; the pastor has only one vote on the council and basically has no voice. Sometimes, in the most extreme cases, it is the laity who preside over the liturgy and the priest confines his role to the consecration alone. Such experiments must be avoided because they do not correspond to the sacramental structure of the Church.

However, I agree that the cooperation between the clergy and the laity in the Catholic Church in Poland calls for a substantial overhaul. The professional knowledge of the laity is invaluable, although it is often not theological. Consequently, not everything the laity propose is acceptable. Nevertheless, changes are needed in the Church in Poland in terms of the interaction between the clergy and the laity.

**Do we not need a change in the language of preaching in homilies and in catechesis?**

If the language of preaching is that of the Gospel, it will resonate. If it is not, it will not resonate with the listeners.

**However, at some point Rome had to switch from Greek to Latin....**

It is obvious that one must constantly strive to use a more comprehensible language. Benedict XVI's post-synodal apostolic exhortation *Verbum Domini* mentions this. However, to say that language should be comprehensible is one thing, but to make it comprehensible is something else. How do we train student priests in seminaries so that later, as priests, they speak a

language that is understandable and so that their preaching does not become trivial? I don't think it is a question of allowing a purely secular language to enter the Church.

### **What can the Church in Poland offer the universal Church at the October synod?**

We have something priceless to offer, namely fidelity to the Church's teaching; this is at least self-declared fidelity, a desire for it. This fidelity usually manifests itself in the teaching and statements of the Polish clergy, despite the various “excesses” we can sometimes witness. On the other hand, I am not aware of any bishops and clergy in Poland enforcing views that incite unfaithfulness to the teaching of the Church. This is priceless.

### **What, then, is the message and contribution of the Polish delegation to this synod?**

We are greatly hopeful, but at the same time much concerned. We have collected what raises our concern or misunderstanding, grouped these topics and commissioned specialists to analyse and elaborate on them. One of these issues is the question of the relationship between synodality and democracy: is the Church system to be a copy of the political system at a given historical moment? We analyse how to practise mercy in line with Christian anthropology. We take up the issue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, the celibacy of the clergy, and the diaconate of women. We have also compiled a study on governance in the Church, the primacy of Peter, synodality and collegiality, because from what we have seen at the continental stage of the synod, these concepts are sometimes used vaguely. Another issue of interest to us is the way in which the mission of the laity in the Church is carried out; for years we have witnessed the clericalization of the laity and the laicization of the clergy. However, we would not want to be the “stumbling blocks” and oppose a desire to deepen the Church's teachings.

One element of these preparations - in an abridged version - is this special synodal supplement addressed to the major opinion-forming Catholic weeklies in Poland. We sincerely hope that this compilation will prove useful during the synod and contribute to a wider participation of clergy and faithful in this endeavour and that above all it will intensify our prayers for the Church.