



WALKING TOGETHER

ARCHBISHOP TIM'S WEEKLY THOUGHTS
FOR REFLECTION FROM THE SYNOD

Monday 23 October, 2023

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

As I begin writing this letter, I am sitting in Saint Peter's Basilica waiting for the Mass for the Feast of St Luke to begin. I will have you all, and those who are dear to you, in my prayers during this Mass. But I will not finish the letter this morning - it will grow over the coming days.

The feast of St Luke holds special significance for the members of the Synod. Those who have been part of the Synodal journey so far will know that Pope Francis, much like Pope Saint John XXIII before him, calls us to "throw open the windows" and "throw open the doors" and make the Church a welcoming home for all. According to one of our Australian biblical scholars, Fr Brendan Byrne SJ, this idea of welcome and open-hearted generosity lies at the centre of St Luke's Gospel. He titles his commentary on this gospel "The Hospitality of God".

It is Jesus who embodies this divine hospitality for all, especially the poorest and most needy. As His disciples, who are called to be Instruments of His peace, we are the ones through whom God wishes to extend the hand of friendship, of welcome, of compassion and of love.

The image of the Church as a home and as a place where everyone is welcome has often been on the lips of Pope Francis during the Synod. He keeps insisting that all are welcome in the Church - *tutti, tutti, tutti* (everyone, everyone, everyone) he says over and over again. No one is excluded because he or she is a sinner, because in reality we are all sinners. Similarly, no one is excluded from the invitation to "repent and believe in the Good News" because we all have need of conversion.

The theme of conversion is emerging very strongly in the discussions during the Synod meetings. There is a growing realisation that any proposed changes to Church structures, and to the exercise of authority, will be fruitless unless these changes are accompanied by a conversion of heart. As a community of faith, we are recognising more and more that any exercise of authority in the Church, whether it be by clergy, religious or laity, needs to be based on the example of Jesus, who described Himself as “meek and humble of heart”. The gospels tell us that the people who encountered Jesus were amazed because He taught with authority - but what this means is that His words were matched by His actions. If some are wondering if the Synod will make any real difference in the Church, part of the answer will lie in the willingness of our leaders, both clerical and lay, to be challenged by the example of Jesus. There is nothing new in this challenge, of course, for it has always been the challenge of the gospel. What is new is the emergence of this theme as a central dimension of the Church’s renewal at this time in our history.

The daily timetable for the Synod is certainly demanding. On most days we begin at 8.45am and work until around 7.30 pm. There is a long break for lunch and the famous Italian “siesta” but, given that many participants are being accommodated in religious houses and hotels which are some distance from the Vatican, much of the break during the day is taken up with travel, either on foot or in buses and cars. During the Synod meetings themselves we are working in a number of languages with English, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese predominating. The task of listening deeply and with open hearts requires concentration and generosity, and this is made even more demanding when having to listen to simultaneous translation. In spite of the difficulties, however, and the variety of views being expressed, there is a remarkable atmosphere of communion, patience and simple human friendliness which seems to grow deeper as each day passes.

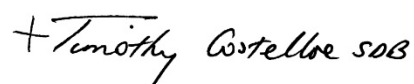
The presence of Pope Francis is felt deeply by everyone, even when he is not physically with us. This is particularly true of some of the concerns which are closest to his heart: the horror of war and the urgent need for peace; the need to encounter the poor and the marginalised with compassion and closeness; and the tragic plight of so many refugees and migrants, many of whom are seeking relief from war or from economic and social hardships.

I am concluding this letter on Friday morning. On Thursday evening, the Holy Father invited all the members of the Synod to join him in St Peter’s Square for a time of prayer for migrants and refugees. We gathered with him around a striking new addition to the Square: a sculpture representing men, women and children all huddled together on a boat as they journey in search of a place of refuge. Above them are the wings of an unseen angel, suggesting that we should “*not neglect to show hospitality to strangers for thereby some have entertained angels unaware*” (Hebrews 13:2). The care of those who are marginalised or abandoned in any way is emerging as a key concern of the Synod. Certainly, for us in Australia, after the results of the recent referendum, we might recognise in some of our indigenous sisters and brothers “*angels in our midst*” who both need and deserve hospitality, both in our own local Christian communities and in our wider Australian society. But, of course, our indigenous people are not the only “hidden angels in our midst”. We might ask the Lord to give us eyes that are open to recognise all these hidden angels - and give us hearts that are ready to respond.

The third week of the Synod Assembly is coming to an end. Towards the middle of next week, the work of gathering the fruits of our assembly will begin in earnest, and decisions will be made about how we carry forward the work of the Synod over the next twelve months. In October of 2024, all the members of the Synod will gather together once again here in Rome to bring the work of the long Synodal journey to a close. We will offer our conclusions to Pope Francis and, together with all of you, await with eager anticipation what he might then offer the Church spread throughout the world. The work of synodality, and the accompanying work of the bishops' collegiality, will reach its culmination in the exercise of the pope's primacy. What will follow will be the implementation phase of the Synod. The People of God in our own part of the world will together listen to the Pope, listen to each other as we discern what God is asking of us through the Pope, and begin the journey of synodality again: listening to each other, listening to the bishops as our leaders in the faith, and listening to the ongoing voice of the pope calling us forward into mission. We are becoming a listening Church, a discerning Church and a faithful, trusting, mission-oriented Church: we are becoming a synodal Church.

May God bless you all, and all who are dear to you.

Yours sincerely in the Lord Jesus,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+ Timothy Costelloe SDB". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

+Archbishop Tim Costelloe SDB DD

Archbishop of Perth