



WALKING TOGETHER

ARCHBISHOP TIM'S WEEKLY THOUGHTS
FOR REFLECTION FROM THE SYNOD

Thursday 5 October, 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

As I write this letter to you, the members of the Synod on Synodality are coming to the end of our three-day retreat. We are staying in a beautiful Retreat Centre about an hour out of Rome. This evening we will all return to Rome in preparation for the formal opening of the Synodal Assembly on 4 October, the feast of Saint Francis of Assisi, which will take place at a Mass in Saint Peter's Square, presided over by Pope Francis.

Before departing from Rome for the retreat, the members of the Synod joined many thousands of people in Saint Peter's Square for an Ecumenical Prayer Vigil on Saturday evening. This prayer vigil was coordinated by the brothers and sisters of Taizé in collaboration with Sister Nathalie Becquart XMCJ, who is one of the undersecretaries of the Secretariat for the Synod. A number of leaders of other Christian Churches and communities, including Anglican Archbishop Justin Welby, the Archbishop of Canterbury, joined Pope Francis in a genuine and moving expression of the unity we share through our common baptism.

In many ways the central focus of the vigil was the role and importance of young people in the Church. Through music, drama, prayer and preaching, and through times of precious silence, the voice of the young was heard by everyone present. In this way, their hopes and dreams for their lives, and for the Church they love, will be carried in the hearts of the Synod members as the Synod unfolds over the coming weeks.

On the Friday evening, the day before the Prayer Vigil, I was privileged to be able to take part in a meeting of young people from all around the world who had gathered to pray together, to listen to each other, and especially to give voice to their own yearnings for the Church to become, more and more, a true reflection of the face of Christ in their own lives, and in the life of the world, or worlds, they inhabit. It is important that

all of us as the Church, the community of the disciples of Christ, listen carefully, and with open hearts and minds, to these voices, for it is they who in God's providence are receiving the gift of the Church, and the gift of faith, from the rest of us.

The journey of the retreat for the members of the Synod has been guided in a very particular way by Father Timothy Radcliffe OP. He has spoken with characteristic English gentleness, but also with the boldness of a son of St Dominic. He has helped us to understand how important this Synod is for the universal Church as it seeks to renew itself in the light of the gospel. He has reminded us of the words of Jesus - *do not be afraid* - and invited us to remember the promise of Jesus that He would send His Spirit upon the Church, the Spirit who will lead us all together into the fullness of the truth.

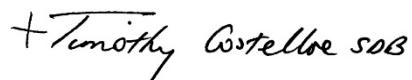
In a sense, we in Australia have a head start in terms of what the Synod is trying to achieve. From a practical point of view, the Australian members of the Synod are already familiar with the structures and processes which we will engage in over the coming weeks, for they are very similar to those of our own Plenary Council. We are familiar, too, with most of the issues and themes for discernment for they, too, have been part of our Plenary Council journey. We have much to offer the worldwide Church because of this experience but, of course, we also have so much to learn. At our Plenary Council we spoke out of our Australian experience. At the Synod we are being invited to open ourselves to the ways in which the Spirit is at work in other cultures and societies. They are different to ours, but no less capable of hearing the voice of God, calling to them in the reality of their own time and place.

This time of retreat has been a moment of grace for us all because it has reminded us that we are engaged in an adventure which can only succeed if it is grounded in deep prayer, careful reflection, open listening and discussion, and deep respect for each other, including those whose experience and whose hopes for the Church may be different to ours.

Please continue to pray for all the members of the Synod that we may all learn how to step aside in order to make room for the Spirit who must be at the heart of everything we do. To paraphrase the famous words of St John the Baptist in speaking of Christ, we might also say, in speaking of his Spirit, "*He must grow greater and we must grow smaller*".

I promise I will remember you all in prayer at the tomb of Saint Peter.

Yours sincerely in Christ,



+Archbishop Tim Costelloe SDB DD
Archbishop of Perth