



General Congregation I

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For a Synodal Church. An integral experience Introduction to Module 1

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Relatore generale

Two speeches in a row from the same person seem a bit like penance... I will therefore try to be brief, but I am convinced that an introduction to the first module of our work, which we are starting now and which will keep us busy until Saturday morning, can be useful.

This module is designed first and foremost to allow us to “warm up our engines,” to live and to experience the methodology that we will also use in the following modules. Above all, it will hopefully help us to learn how to make the alternation between *Circuli Minores* and General Congregations fruitful. I have already spoken about this in my previous speech, so I will not dwell on it now.

However, this first module also has another, far more important function. It must help us to make contact with synodality as a comprehensive vision, or rather, as the module title says, with the synodal Church as an integral experience. This is a step of fundamental importance for our work. In fact, the questions we will be dealing with in the subsequent modules need to be placed within a horizon, which constitutes the perspective of meaning and avoids the risk of getting lost in mere detail. At the same time, the concreteness of the questions that we will address later on frees the overview from the risk of abstraction and generalisation. Thus, between the first and subsequent modules, there is a dynamic relationship that is of vital importance for the fruitfulness of our discernment. This is why the *Instrumentum laboris* reminds us that our commitment during the work of the Assembly is “to sustain a dynamic equilibrium between maintaining an overview, which characterises the work outlined in section A, and the identification of practical steps to be taken in a concrete and timely fashion, work which is the focus of section B” (no. 16). So, on Saturday lunchtime we will conclude Module 1, but we will not simply send it to the archives: we will carry the formation and training it has given us into the next modules.

To begin this training, I propose that we exercise the faculty of memory, in its most profoundly spiritual sense. All of us here are members of the People of God, and as such for the past two years we have set out on the synodal path. This journey together has left traces in each of us: thoughts, emotions, feelings, intuitions, doubts, fears, enthusiasm... To undertake the work of the first module, each of us needs to reconnect with this heritage. I am well aware that, for many reasons, not all of us have been involved in the synodal process in the same way. For some of us – I am thinking in particular of those who worked to organise the Continental Assemblies, took part in them and contributed to the drafting of the Final Documents – the Synodal process has been probably the most important commitment of the year. Others experienced it in a more distant manner, trusting the synodal teams they had appointed. The latter will probably have fewer rich personal memories, but they can also refer to what they have heard from those who have participated more actively: other bishops of the same Bishops' Conference, but above all priests, deacons, women and men religious, laymen and women with whom they have been in contact over the past two years. The memory to connect with is the collective memory of the People of God, not just the personal memory of each individual. This is why the many documents produced during the synodal process can also help: the synthesis of one's own diocese, that of one's own Bishops' Conference, the *Working Document for the Continental Stage*, the Final Document of the Assembly of one's own continent, and above all Section A of the *Instrumentum laboris*.

It is this enormous wealth that the Worksheet you received in Sacrofano tries to summarise on the first page, which serves to introduce the question for discernment. I want to take it up here because during the work of the next few days it is essential that we have in mind that our goal is to formulate an answer to this question:

Starting from the journey of the local Churches to which we each belong and from the contents of the *Instrumentum laboris*, which distinctive signs of a synodal Church emerge with greater clarity and which deserve greater recognition or should be particularly highlighted or deepened?

This question clearly shows us what to pay attention to when each one digs into his or her own memory of the synod process, and especially when we share the fruits of this work tomorrow. Let us allow the points on which we feel there is great clarity to emerge, but let us not overlook those where we feel there is still work to be done, where there is a mixture of light and shade, without fear of pointing out the reasons for uncertainty or doubt.

Tomorrow we will spend the whole day working in the *Circuli Minores*, applying the method of conversation in the Spirit. I would like to recall the succinct description of this method given in n. 37 of the *Instrumentum laboris*: “conversation in the Spirit can be described as a shared prayer with a view to communal discernment for which participants prepare themselves by personal reflection and meditation. They give each other the gift of a meditated word nourished by prayer, not an opinion improvised on the spot.” For our work to be fruitful, for our communal discernment to proceed, tomorrow we must arrive prepared.

In the morning, in the *Circuli Minores* we will begin with a moment of mutual listening: each person will have four minutes to communicate what is most important to him or her. It will be possible to deliver the text of your speech, preferably in electronic format, to the Secretariat, so that it will enter into the Assembly materials. Four minutes is a short time, and I am sure each of us would have enough to share to fill a much longer slot. Therefore, each of us is invited to choose what seems most important and most meaningful, what they feel emerges most strongly from their memory. I invite everyone – if you have not already done so – to carve out some time for reflection and prayer this evening, or tomorrow morning for those who get up early, so as to focus on what they want to communicate in their opening intervention in the group. The time each person invests in preparation will be an important contribution to the quality of our common work.

In view of this preparation work, let me suggest a Gospel passage: the account of the disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-35). We are all familiar with this passage, but we need to meditate on it again. The two disciples walk in silence, their eyes downcast. Then, when Jesus approaches, his presence and his questions open up a space for speaking and listening. They thus begin to tell, that is, they exercise their memory, and it is a tale of hope and enthusiasm. But then disillusionment, frustration, anger, and fear also emerge. They are not afraid to entrust all this to the mysterious wayfarer, and so they discover that listening to his Word dissolves their heaviness and transforms their desolation into a consolation that grows. No. 36 of the *Instrumentum laboris*, which refers to this very passage, comments: “conversation in the Spirit builds communion and brings missionary dynamism. The two, in fact, return to the community they had left to share the Easter proclamation that the Lord is risen.” I do not know if we will have many moments of desolation in our walking together, but I am confident that by the work of the Holy Spirit, consolation will enter our hearts, which is the condition for undertaking a good discernment. I believe that returning to reflect, even briefly, on this passage from the Gospel of Luke can help us to enter into tomorrow’s work with the right dispositions.

This concludes my introduction. After few minutes of silence, I now gladly leave the floor to Mother Ignazia Angelini. Tomorrow, in the *Circuli Minores*, we will have to walk together. We therefore ask her to nourish our Spirit in view of that commitment, and I know that she will do so drawing on the profound experience of the great saint we are celebrating today. Finally, two testimonies will help us get in touch with the synodal memory of the People of God.