



General Congregation 4 - 9 October 2023

A communion that radiates

Introduction to Module 2

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Good morning, everyone, and welcome back to our Hall after the break that allowed us to celebrate Sunday. With this morning's Holy Mass, we were able to savour the richness of one of the rites of our one and multifaceted Church, and in this way, we entered the second Module of our work, linked to Section B1 of the *Instrumentum laboris*.

In the first Module, we reconnected with the experience of the “journeying together” of the People of God over the past two years. We worked to bring the synodal Church into sharper focus as a comprehensive vision. With the second Module, we address the first of the three questions that have emerged from listening to the People of God and on which this Assembly is called to exercise its discernment. But let us not forget the first Module. To avoid losing the sense of what we are doing, we need to place the work of the next few days - which will lead us to confront specific and concrete questions - within the horizon of the work undertaken between last Wednesday and Saturday. We carry forwards from the first module a second fruit that is equally important. We gained experience in using the methodology of Conversation in the Spirit and can thus feel more at ease in a way of walking together that we will continue to practise. Above all, we have begun to weave relationships and build bonds. We have begun to move from the “I” to the “we”. In this Module, the composition of the *Circuli Minores* changes, but we are invited to carry the collaborative atmosphere of the past few days with us. I thank the facilitators again for their service.

This introduction to the second Module integrates several voices: in a moment I will hand the floor to Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP and Professor Anna Rowlands, who will give us an overview of the theme of Module 2 from a biblical-spiritual and theological perspective, respectively. I thank them for their willingness to help me launch the work of the next few days. Three testimonies by Assembly members will follow: they will share experiences of their local Churches related to the theme of our Module.

But the time has come to address the theme of Module 2. If your mind works anything like mine, when you read the many questions in the Worksheets of Section B1 of the

Instrumentum laboris, you might find it helpful to focus first on the title “A communion that radiates”, and even more the question that immediately follows: “How can we be more fully a sign and instrument of union with God and of the unity of all humanity?”. This is the priority issue coming out of the synodal process that can help us find orientation in our discussions in Module 2.

We are first in communion with God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The Holy Trinity is the basis of all communions. The Triune God has created humanity, each human being; and this God, who is love, loves the whole of creation, every single creature and every human being in a special way. God’s love is so great that His saving power is the way His love manifests itself. As Church, as People of God, we are in this dynamic of salvation. And within this dynamic lie the foundations of the unity of humanity.

Each one’s own personal history, and the multiplicity of our human experiences, gathered in a synodal way, helps us to better understand the questions that Section B1 of the *Instrumentum laboris* raises, and to try to find answers.

Allow me to share one such experience. I happened to listen to the story of a family who had moved from Africa to a European country. They found it very difficult to find a parish in which to live their faith. The Catholic parish they first attended was a parish of churchgoers, but the community did not offer a deeper sense of communion. They were frowned upon because they had different religious customs. They felt excluded. They found a Methodist community where they were welcomed, they got concrete help in taking their first steps in their new country. Above all, they were welcomed as brothers and sisters, not as objects of charity, they were not simply a means for people who wanted to do good. They were accepted as fellow human beings, walking together. When I heard this testimony, I thought of my own country, my own Church. Probably the same thing would have happened, with the exception that we have no Methodist Church to welcome them.

All are invited to be part of the Church. At World Youth Day in Lisbon Pope Francis reiterated the words “todos... todos”. And in his homily at the opening Mass of our Assembly: “tutti... tutti”. In deep communion with His Father through the Holy Spirit, Jesus extended this communion to all the sinners. Are we ready to do the same? Are we ready to do this with groups which might irritate us because their way of being might seem to threaten our identity? Todos... tutti... If we act like Jesus, we will testify to God’s love for the world. Failing to do so will make us look like an identitarian club.

What does this mean for ecumenism? How can we live our Catholic faith in such a way that the deep communion we felt at the prayer vigil before our retreat is not a beautiful

exception, but becomes ordinary reality? How can we live our faith deeply in our own culture without shutting out people of other cultures? How can we be committed with women and men of other faith traditions to justice, peace and integral ecology?

This is an example of what is at stake in Module 2. We need to think, we need to reflect, but our reflection should not take the form of a theological or sociological treatise. We need to start from concrete experiences, our own personal one and above all the collective experience of the People of God that has spoken through the listening phase.

Allow me one more minute to briefly go over the steps in this Module. This afternoon and tomorrow morning we will work in the *Circuli Minores*, according to the method of communal discernment inspired by conversation in the Spirit that we have already practised. We listen to each other, we listen to the Spirit, we will begin to draft the group's report and prepare the speech that the rapporteur will read in the assembly, focusing on the points that your group wishes to submit to the assembly in order to go deeper in a common discernment.

There is also something new: the composition of the groups has changed. You realised this the moment you sat down at your table. This time, the groups are formed based on both language and thematic preferences. We have followed the choices you made as much as possible. Unlike the first Module, the groups do not all follow the same track, but each one tackles just one of the five Worksheets that the *Instrumentum laboris* sets out in Section B1. However, we do not inhabit different planets. As the *Instrumentum laboris* itself explains, "There are obvious points of contact and some overlaps between the Worksheets. [...] this highlights the rich network of interconnections between the topics covered." Thus, we can imagine the five Worksheets as different perspectives from which to approach the basic question of our Module, the one in the title which I mentioned at the beginning: "How can we be more fully a sign and instrument of union with God and of the unity of all humanity?"

In different contexts this question has different resonances. The plurality of traces helps bring these resonances to the surface, allowing each one of us to offer a contribution rooted in the particular perspective of the local Church from which they come. Moreover, the variety of local contexts also finds space within individual Worksheets. Each one focuses on a "Question for discernment", which the group should address. The other questions you find in the Worksheet are rooted in what was gathered from listening phase. They give expression to the concrete areas in which the question for discernment takes form in different regions. This helps us to avoid speaking in mere generalities. They bear the image and concerns of the People of God. However, the aim of the group work is not to tackle each of these more detailed questions one by one. The variety offered by diverse reflections on the Worksheets and the particularity

of each group will make our plenary exchange even richer. That is why in Module 2, as in those on the other parts of Section B that will follow, we will have three General Congregations, that is, three half-days, and not just two, to listen to the communications of the *Circuli Minores* and to free interventions.

I now invite Fr Timothy Radcliffe OP and then Professor Anna Rowlands to take the floor. The pause for silence that will follow each of their interventions will encourage meditative listening on our part. We are not asking them for suggestions or pre-packaged answers, nor are we asking them to do the work for us. Rather, we expect them to illuminate the spiritual and theological horizon within which the issues we are called to deal with are situated and to provide us with some stimulus to help us to construct the language with which to address them.