

Special Assembly of the Synod of Bishops for the Pan-Amazon Region

New Paths for the Church and for Integral Ecology

Brother bishops, clergy and faithful of the AEC! I am certain you have been following via social media the proceedings of the Pan-Amazon Synod which is being held in Rome and now into its second week.

The Synod began with an opening Mass on Sunday, October 6, 2019 at St. Peter's Basilica and presided over by our Holy Father, Francis. His was nothing less than a sterling homily, setting the pace for the subsequent Synod days. Some of his salient points in that homily were as follows:

- The assertion that the mission of creating new paths for the Church and for integral ecology is of necessity a journeying taken together;
- He spoke of the giftedness of the episcopacy which is meant, in its turn, to be given - "if we make ourselves the center and not the gift we have received, we become bureaucrats, not shepherds. We turn the gift into a job and its gratuitousness vanishes;"
- He said "the gift we receive is a fire, a burning love for God and for our brothers and sisters;
- "If everything continues as it was," the Holy Father stressed, "if we spend our days content that 'this is the way things have always been done' then the gift vanishes, smothered by the ashes of fear and concern for defending the *status quo*;
- "Missionary outreach, he says, is a clear sign of the maturity of an ecclesial community."
- In that regard, "The Church is always on the move, always going out and never withdrawn into itself"
- God has given us the spirit of prudence, he says, "not to be confused with timidity or fear; rather, it is "the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it" (CCC 1806).
- "Prudence, he affirmed, "is not indecision; it is not a defensive attitude. It is the virtue of the pastor who, in order to serve with wisdom, is able to discern, to be receptive to the newness of the Spirit.
- The Holy Father called all to pray that "the Spirit which makes all things new, give us his own daring prudence; that he inspire our Synod to renew the paths of the Church in Amazonia, so that the fire of mission will continue to burn."
- Referencing the story of the burning bush in (Ex 3:2), he say "it is a fire of love that illumines, warms and gives life, not a fire that blazes up and devours. When peoples and cultures are devoured without love and without respect, it is not God's fire but the fire of the world."

- Then He asked: “How many times has God’s gift been imposed and not offered; how many times has there been colonization rather than evangelization! He prayed that “God will preserve us from the greed of new forms of colonialism.
- He stressed that “The fire set by interests that destroy, like the fire that recently devastated Amazonia, is not the fire of the Gospel.”

Therefore from October 7 - 27, 2019 the basic format of the Synod consists in:

1. The opening presentation by the Holy Father;
2. Introductory presentations on the theme of the synod, which is: *The Amazon: New paths for the Church and for integral Ecology*;
3. Interventions from the 185 Synod Fathers and other participants;
4. Small group work on the Synod theme; and
5. Voting on the recommendations from the synod.

At this point no one can tell what the decision will be. Only to say that the presentation from the various participants are quite engaging. They are focused basically on the two major threads that run through the synod: 1) integral ecology and the contemporary challenges as it pertains to the Amazon and the wider world by extension; and 2) the pastoral needs of the region, particularly in relation to the ordained ministry, the concomitant involvement of the laity, especially women, in that ministry, sustaining the integrity of the indigenous inhabitants of the Amazon, and the like.

I forward, therefore, the voice clippings of the presentation of our (AEC) participants in the Synod, which will give you an idea of the trend of the discussions at the Synod.

From all indications, the entire world awaits eagerly for the outcome of the Synod, which is hoped will set new paths for the Church.