

Potential pitfalls on the journey



CONVERSATIONS WITH ARCHBISHOP J

Q: Archbishop J, what are the challenges while on the synodal journey?

Every journey to mission begins with temptations. Right after Jesus was baptised the Scripture says: “Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil” (Mt 4:1). The temptations were not accidental. It was the Holy Spirit that led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted. After Jesus endured the temptations, He entered into mission.

What is true for Jesus is true for the Church. If we are recalibrating for mission, we must expect to be tempted. A perspective on these temptations is vital for the Church to move through the synodal process to mission.

The *Vademecum* for the Synod on Synodality, the synod’s official handbook, which prepares teams leading the process, outlines nine temptations or pitfalls that must be avoided (cf 2.4). I invite you to reflect with me on these temptations.

The temptations

1) The temptation of wanting to lead ourselves instead of being led by God: At the heart of this synodal journey is a profound opportunity to turn the hearts of the whole People of God towards discipleship.

We are a very vibrant, rambunctious people. We have more opinions than most. That is our temptation. This is a time to humble ourselves, listen to God and each other, beg for the grace to discern in which direction God is leading, and bend our hearts to His will. This is the grace we need the most.

2) The temptation to focus on ourselves and our immediate concerns: Albert Einstein said: “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.”

The synodal process presents us with the opportunity to engage in thinking that is deep, expansive, and patient. We need as many perspectives as possible. We need to listen to people from whom we have not heard before and think about the challenges to the Church in new ways.

To discover God’s plan, we need to open our ears, hearts, and minds. We all need to pursue a single question—What is God’s dream for our Church?

3) The temptation to only see ‘problems’: We are excellent at

naming the problem, discussing it *ad nauseam*, returning to it again, and getting no further. The synod offers us the opportunity to dream about the solutions and the desire of God for the Church in T&T. This requires the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see what God is doing.

4) The temptation of focusing only on structures: Synodality is, first of all, about the engagement of people. It is intended to release their energy, so they participate in the Church, grow in unity, and discern the path together. Only when people have been renewed will structures make a difference.

Our opportunity is to dream of ways of relating that will bring about a better Church experience for all of us. Then new structures will be life-giving.

5) The temptation not to look beyond the visible confines of the Church:

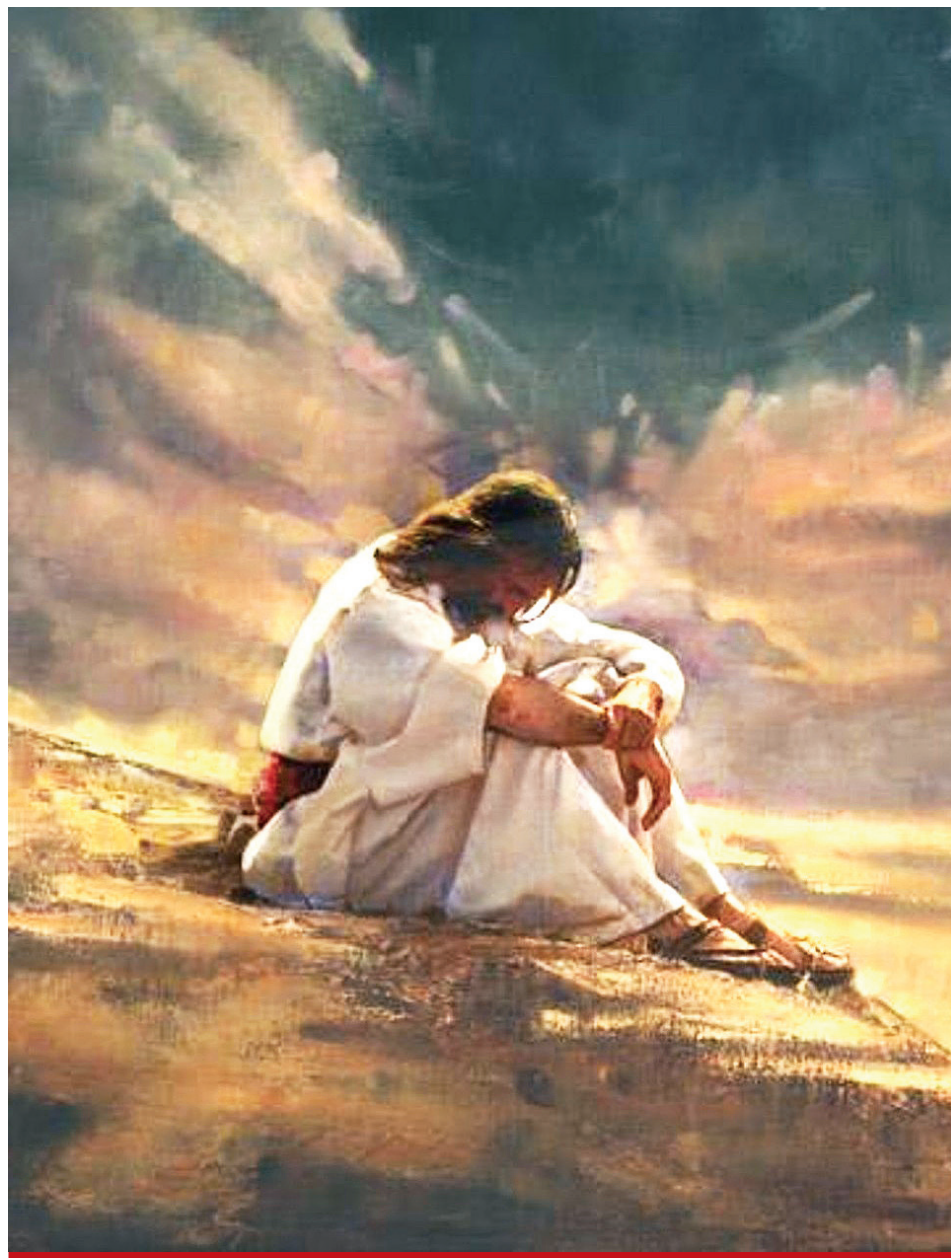
The Holy Father is encouraging us to engage as many perspectives as possible. We need to enter into dialogue with the politician, the intellectual, the business leader, the sports personality, the migrant, the refugee, the poor, the grandmother, and the artisan. We are asked to go into the whole world to proclaim the Good News. We need to engage as many viewpoints as possible to assist us in this crucial mission.

6) The temptation to lose focus of the objectives of the synodal process: Even while we draw upon various perspectives, we need to focus like a laser on the purpose of the synod—to discern God’s desire for a synodal Church, a Church in a perpetual state of *‘walking together’*. This is the single focus of the listening.

We will hear many vital and important things; we need to collect these and keep them for ongoing listening, while we focus on the purpose of this exercise.

7) The temptation of conflict and division: “*That they may all be one*” (Jn 17:21). As we begin to speak, a lot of pain will be released. We need to listen to this pain and seek to bring healing, which requires persons to listen deeply to one another and to build deeper bonds of unity. Communion is the fruit of deep listening.

8) The temptation to treat the Synod as a kind of a parliament: Our opportunity is to move from a “deliberative assembly” to a



A perspective on these temptations is vital for the Church to move through the synodal process to mission.

“discerning assembly”. This requires that all of us learn to bend our hearts to God’s Will. This is a great opportunity for the renewal of the Church.

9) The temptation to listen only to those who are already involved in Church activities: The greatest temptation is to do a quick, easy job and listen to the 14 per cent who we hear all the time. The Church has given into this temptation so often. We need to widen our view and really listen deeply to the widest group of people possible.

10) The temptation to not listen at all: I added this temptation. We can do an exercise for Rome without listening at all. It would be a lost opportunity for the Church in our age if it were to act in this way. Since 1977, we agreed we needed to be a listening Church, and we have achieved this gold standard many times. But, many times, we have not listened as a

Church. Here, we need to confess we have not always listened. Even when we have, we have not always listened well or deeply. We have now a golden opportunity to do so. Let us see this time as an opportunity God has given us for the renewal of the Church.

Key Message:

The journey to mission is always interrupted by temptations. We need to name them and find the opportunities to follow God’s Will in each temptation.

Action Step:

Become aware of the challenges to your listening, the temptations in your everyday experience. Start naming the temptations and choosing God’s opportunity.

Scripture Reading:

Mt 4:1-11