

## **“YOU GO INTO MY VINEYARD TOO” (MATT. 20:4): LISTENING TO THE MURMUR FOR EFFECTIVE SYNODALITY**

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### **Abstract**

*Christ, during his earthly ministry, manifested his large-heartedness in a missionary disposition that was all-inclusive. He showed love to all and sundry through his healings, miracles, and show of compassion. It was love that was as unconditional as it was boundless. His attitude towards the Jews was the same to the Gentiles, to the utter consternation of many, especially those who received the favour. His spirit of synodality was matchless, especially in accepting into his vineyard all who desired to participate, not minding the variation in the time of arrival. He carried everybody along by giving empathic listening to all, especially the dregs of society, the widows and orphans, the oppressed and the marginalised. He always listened in order to bring every sheep into the one sheepfold. At the end of his earthly ministry, he mandated his apostles to the ends of the earth. Even today, the Church goes on tirelessly in the bid to achieve a fruitful realisation of that mandate in our time. Such effort through the instrumentality of the clergy, consecrated persons, and lay faithful is widespread in parishes, dioceses, and religious congregations on different continents around the world. The researcher intends to explore the crucial role of unselective listening in the process of synodality.*

**Keywords:** Listening, Synodality, Dialogue, Pope Francis, Vineyard

### **1. Introduction**

The words of the gospel parable – "You go into my vineyard too" – demonstrate God's magnanimity devoid of any mercantile colouration towards His invitation to each and every Christian called to a different vocation in life. It appears to be crafted in a framework of labour relations. Still, it goes beyond that to expose the immensity of God's grace, particularly in our pastoral and missionary endeavours, especially in the spirit of synodality, but more so in the living out of our faith within the vicissitudes of our daily life encounters.

The missionary encounter is usually founded on the fact of *fides ex auditu* – “faith comes from hearing” (Rom. 10:17). Efforts are put in place towards walking together – the Bishops, priests, and lay faithful. Such synodality requires acute but unselective listening, even to the uncomfortable voices. Attention has to be given to all. In the words of Pope Francis,

to walk together is *the constitutive way* of the Church, *the figure* that enables us to interpret reality with the eyes and heart of God, *the condition* for following the Lord Jesus and being servants of life in this wounded time. The breath and pace of the Synod show what we are and the dynamism of communion that animates our decisions; only in this way can we truly renew our pastoral ministry and adapt it to the mission of the Church in today's world; only in this way can we address the complexity of this time, thankful for the journey accomplished thus far, and determined to continue it with *parrhesia*.<sup>1</sup>

Synodality, therefore, demands a going-out, being meaningfully in motion.

## 2. Missionary Invitation: Attention to a Calibrated Motion

The gospel pericope makes reference to the fact that the vineyard owner went out at the early hour of the day, then third hour, sixth hour, ninth hour and eleventh hour. He was patiently but painstakingly inviting workers into his vineyard. These five moments of the day in exegetical analysis appear to refer to the different epochs of human history, starting from Adam to Noah, from Noah to Abraham, from Abraham to Moses, and from Moses to Christ. The eleventh hour could refer to the present time, which begins with Christ and ends with his return. Nonetheless, in the everydayness of man's personal life on earth, the Lord always calls. Every moment is a *hic et nunc* (here and now) that demands listening to the Lord, who calls and sends to His vineyard.<sup>2</sup> He calls as he wishes regardless of our unworthiness, and he is not conditioned by our thoughts, status, desires or temperaments.

The temporal variance could also "stand for five stages of the human life. No matter if one is still a child or a youngster, an adult, old or very old, at each age, one can enter the vineyard; that is to say, one can start doing the deeds which are demanded by and appropriate to the kingdom of God. It often leads to an exhortation to enter the vineyard, to respond to the calling that is implied by the parable, and not to delay a Christian life to one's life's end."<sup>3</sup>

From the parable, the carefully chosen verb of motion, 'go', is indicative of a Church that is *per naturam* in motion, a synodal Church. In the words of Pope Francis, "Jesus's desire is to set people out on a journey, moving them from a lethal sedentary lifestyle and breaking through the illusion that they can live happily

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<sup>1</sup> Francis, Address at the Opening of the 70th General Assembly of the Italian Episcopal Conference, 22 May 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Fausti, S., *Una comunità che legge il vangelo di Matteo*, Bologna: EDB, 2001, p.390.

<sup>3</sup> Tevel J.M., The Labourers in the Vineyard: The Exegesis of Matthew 20,1-7 in the Early Church Authors, *Vigiliae Christianae*, Vol. 46, No.4, 1992, p.359.

while remaining comfortably seated amid their certainties.”<sup>4</sup> Pastors of souls are therefore charged with the responsibility of guiding the faithful towards feeding on the nourishing fruit of the sound doctrine and feeding the flock with the milk of the Word and Sacrament. For one to be a rich fountain, one needs to be *au courant* with the teachings of the Church. It is therefore necessary to harken to the advice of Gregory the Great: “Keep watch over your manner of life ... and make sure that you are indeed the Lord's labourers. Each person should take into account what he does and consider if he is labouring in the vineyard of the Lord.”<sup>5</sup>

In the spirit of the synod on synodality, it is obvious that there is a need for pastoral cooperation, which is built on mutual listening for fruitful output. Sequel to that, the exhortation of the Vatican II Council Fathers becomes *ad rem*:

Pastors... know that they were not established by Christ to undertake by themselves the entire saving mission of the Church to the world. They appreciate, rather, that it is their exalted task to shepherd the faithful and at the same time acknowledge their ministries and charisms so that all in their separate ways, but of one mind, may cooperate in the common task.<sup>6</sup>

The lay faithful have to be properly guided and trained to make a laudable contribution to pastoral ministry. They are also invited to go into the vineyard too and be ready to carry out the ministry with apostolic enthusiasm wherever and whenever the need arises. In order to carry out that assignment effectively, the Apostolic Letter, *Antiquum Ministerium*, enjoined that the co-workers should be men and women of deep faith and human maturity, active participants in the life of the Christian community, capable of welcoming others, generous and living a life of fraternal communion.<sup>7</sup>

It is in this process of all-involving participation that synodality is adequately manifested, but not without paying keen attention to the rumour of the murmur.

### **3. The Rumour of the Murmur: Grumbling at the Householder**

Evidence abounds in the Scriptures regarding loud murmuring and grumbling, presented in Greek and Latin with the onomatopoeia *gongysmos* (γογγυσμός) and *susurratio*, respectively. The Old and New Testaments testify to the evidence of classical murmurings. The Israelites against God and Moses in the desert (Num. 14:27); recall the rancour of Jonah against the Lord for saving the

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<sup>4</sup> Francis, *Message to participants at a vocations promotion conference sponsored by the Congregation for Clergy*, 21/10/2016.

<sup>5</sup> Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Evangelium*, I, 29, 2.

<sup>6</sup> Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium* 30.

<sup>7</sup> Francis, *Antiquum Ministerium* n.8, Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2021.

Ninivites (Jnh.4:1ff); think of the Scribes and Pharisees murmuring against Jesus Christ because he welcomes sinners and eats with them (Lk. 15:1ff); or is it the anger of the elder brother against his father for celebrating the return of his prodigal younger brother (Lk. 15:28); or the annoyance of Martha against Jesus for allowing Mary the privilege of listening to him instead of helping her in the service (Lk. 10,40). There can be an endless repertoire of murmurs if each person begins to add his own. Even in our missionary endeavours and more still even in the disposition to realize the demands of synodality, murmurs could be generated. Not listening to such murmurs and addressing them effectively or treating them with levity, no matter the form and dimension it takes will be totally contradictory to what the synodality stands for. It is necessary to remember that the labourers in our pericope were presuming themselves to be more just and worthy of privileged recompenses. Sequel to that, they murmured profusely against the owner of the vineyard for his magnanimity.

Interestingly, the fire of these murmurings was not glossed over by our Lord; rather, he listened to them and doused the heat of the rumour of the murmur in a masterly manner. Each one was responded to in a peculiar manner. Certainly, these are obviously boisterous murmurings that could be easily distinguished and handled if there is a proper spiritual disposition towards amendment. But there is also interior or tacit murmuring, which could be more devastating and could poison the synodal process and the disposition towards reconciliation with God and with one another. Such inimical disposition could hamper communion and participation and, in the long run, diminish the yielding of effective fruit. The universal Church tirelessly makes a sincere effort to attend to such murmurings so as to promote an inclusive participation of all the *Christifideles*. To that effect,

Each individual Church that would voluntarily cut itself off from the universal Church would lose its relationship to God's plan.... But, at the same time, a Church *toto orbe diffusa* would become an abstraction if she did not take body and life precisely through the individual Churches. Only continual attention to these two poles of the Church will enable us to perceive the richness of this relationship.<sup>8</sup>

There could, however, be tacit murmuring when the universal character of the Church appears to be given much discriminatory colouration in some area of missionary endeavour. There could be tacit murmuring in the synodal process when human elements appear to suffocate the process of walking together for the realization of the gospel message. There could be tacit murmuring when the

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<sup>8</sup> Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n.62. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1975.

synodality in particular churches that is supposed to engage tirelessly in the work of converting worldly politics towards the welfare of the people seems to be sunk deep in the evil machination characteristic of worldly politics. On the contrary,

The individual Churches, intimately built up not only of people but also of aspirations, of riches and limitations, of ways of praying, of loving, of looking at life and the world, which distinguish this or that human gathering, have the task of assimilating the essence of the Gospel message and of transposing it, without the slightest betrayal of its essential truth, into the language that these particular people understand, then of proclaiming it in this language.<sup>9</sup>

When that is properly done, the murmur will fizzle out. There could equally be tacit murmuring if there seem to be apparent sacred cows that seem to always be favoured on account of their financial might or respect for cult of personality. However, when what is murmured against because it is incongruous with what ought to be turns out to be swept under the carpet, it could stifle the missionary zeal.

All in all, it is the Master who calls and sends at different intervals without discrimination. In fact, “if he is a figure for God, his actions show that God's generosity, which is not merited, is freely lavished on those most in need. God's generosity does no injustice, but neither can it be calculated or earned.”<sup>10</sup>

God's great gifts, simply because they are God's, are distributed, not because they are earned, but because he is gracious. Jesus is not laying down principles for resolving union-management disputes. On the contrary, “the principle in the world is that he who works the longest receives the most pay. That is just. But in the kingdom of God, the principles of merit and ability may be set aside so that grace can prevail.”<sup>11</sup>

Over and above our human effort, which is not to be taken for granted, is the primacy of the superabundance of God's graciousness.

#### **4. The Dynamics of Listening as Catalyst to Dialogue**

Any dialogue worthy of the name must be founded on listening. The ability to listen attentively promotes effective dialogue. A literary investigation

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<sup>9</sup> Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, n.63.

<sup>10</sup> Reid, E.B. The gospel according to Matthew, in Durken, D (ed.), *New Collegeville Bible Commentary*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2017, p.1782.

<sup>11</sup> Carson, D.A. et al., *Matthew, the expositor's bible commentary*. Michigan: Zondervan, 2010, p.740.

into dialogue reveals that it is derived from the Greek word *διαλογος* (dialogos). *Διαλογος* is a composite of two words, *δια* (dia), which, among other things, means "mutual relation, one with another;"<sup>12</sup> and *λογος* which, apart from meaning "word", also means "speech, discourse, conversation."<sup>13</sup> Based on these etymological foundations, Chambers's Twentieth Century Dictionary defines dialogue as "a conversation between two or more persons, especially of a formal or imaginary nature: an exchange of views in the hope of ultimately reaching agreement."<sup>14</sup>

The social nature of man made him prone to dialogue. In the everydayness of man's existence, dialogue remains a regular exercise that is totally engrafted into his nature, be it in the diurnal exchange of pleasantries, in the day-to-day cross-pollination of ideas, or even in the ordinariness of daily life. In fact, dialogue permeates his whole life. So, it covers not only an exchange of views on scientific and intellectual subjects but even the most ordinary conversation about what we experience in our daily lives.

Some prerequisites are essentially pertinent for any dialogue to be worth the name and to yield the desired positive result. There must be an unmitigated disposition to listen to the other so that one can understand and gain from his position for onward development. This was aptly described in Martin Buber's I-Thou relationship.

In the I-Thou relationship, we are genuinely living in the present because we are prepared for any and every response to our address, both the expected and the unexpected, and it is this that constitutes genuine listening. The difference between pseudo-listening and genuine listening is that while in the pseudo-listening situation, the listener pretends to listen, what he hears is determined by his past knowledge of the person he is listening to or by his theories concerning the nature of man. Genuine listening does not know ahead of time what it will hear; in the full uniqueness of the present, it listens to the speech of the other without filtering what it hears through the screen of its own prejudices. The purpose of genuine listening is, therefore, really to hear what the other is saying, constantly being aware that he is saying something new.<sup>15</sup>

It is in that light that we have to consider listening in communication in order to help us delineate its crucial place in synodality. Listening is the ability to

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<sup>12</sup>Liddell & Scott, *An intermediate Greek-English lexicon*, Oxford University Press, Great Britain 1999.

<sup>13</sup>Liddell & Scott, *An intermediate Greek-English lexicon*.

<sup>14</sup>Kirkpatrick, E.M. (ed.) *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*, Great Britain: Richard Clay (The Chaucer Press) Ltd. 1983.

<sup>15</sup>Wyschogrod, M., Buber, Martin. In Edward P., (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Philosophy* vol.1, p.410.

accurately receive and interpret messages in the communication process. Listening is the key to all effective communication, and communication has a primacy of place in every synodal process. Without the ability to listen effectively, messages are easily misunderstood, if not entirely glossed over. As a result, communication breaks down, and the sender of the message can easily become frustrated or irritated. It is important to note that hearing is different from listening. Hearing refers to the sounds that enter one's ears and are equally perceived if the ears are functioning properly. It is a physical process that, provided you do not have any hearing problems, happens automatically. Nevertheless, there are various categories of listening.

### **I. Discriminative Listening**

It is fundamental in the process of listening. It is the pillar on which other forms of listening are founded. Here, sounds are differentiated and identified. In the process of differentiation and discrimination of sounds, meaning is generated. In fact, "with discriminative listening, individuals first determine auditory and/or visual stimuli. In discriminative listening, individuals exhibit sensitivity to both verbal and non-verbal cues. Discriminative listening is much like a supra-structure for other types of listening."<sup>16</sup> Listening is a visual as well as auditory act, as we communicate much through body language. We thus also need to be able to discriminate between muscle and skeletal movements that signify different meanings.<sup>17</sup>

### **II. Comprehensive Listening**

The discrimination of sounds helps in the process of understanding. Comprehending demands having the necessary knowledge, vocabulary, and adherence to the rules of grammar, which will help in understanding what others are communicating. "With comprehensive listening, the individual understands the core ideas within a message. Comprehensive listening occurs in a variety of settings, such as lectures, using specific directions, and any situation that requires the individual to pay close attention to the message."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>Welch, S.A. A Listening Competence Comparison of Working Professionals. *The International Journal of Listening*, 2013, p.86.

<sup>17</sup>[http://changingminds.org/techniques/listening/types\\_listening.htm](http://changingminds.org/techniques/listening/types_listening.htm) accessed 4/5/2024.

<sup>18</sup>Welch, S.A. A Listening Competence Comparison of Working Professionals. *The International Journal of Listening*, p.86.

### **Iii. Critical Listening**

Critical listening involves evaluating and judging, forming opinions about what is being said. Judgment includes assessing strengths and weaknesses, agreement, and approval. This form of listening requires significant real-time cognitive effort as the listener analyzes what is being said, relating it to existing knowledge and rules while simultaneously listening to the speaker's words.<sup>19</sup> With critical listening, the individual listens to make a critical assessment of a message, with the intent to either accept or reject the message based on what the individual heard and perceived.<sup>20</sup>

### **Iv. Appreciative Listening**

"With appreciative listening, the individual listens for the pleasure of listening. Here, individuals focus on the vocal qualities of a message or focus on surrounding sounds, all with the purpose of enjoyment. In addition to listening, appreciation involves visual stimuli which complement the auditory sensations."<sup>21</sup> In appreciative listening, we seek certain information that we will appreciate, for example, that which helps meet our needs and goals. We use appreciative listening when we are listening to good music, poetry, or maybe even the stirring words of a great leader.

### **V. Empathetic Listening**

It is a profound communication skill that involves understanding and reflecting the speaker's feelings and thoughts. In psychology, it is fundamental to foster trust, rapport, and emotional support in various settings, from therapeutic relationships to everyday interactions.<sup>22</sup> When we listen empathetically, we go beyond sympathy to seek a truer understanding of how others are feeling. This requires excellent discrimination and close attention to the nuances of emotional signals. When we are being truly empathetic, we actually feel what they are feeling.

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<sup>19</sup>[http://changingminds.org/techniques/listening/types\\_listening.htm](http://changingminds.org/techniques/listening/types_listening.htm) accessed 5/5/2024.

<sup>20</sup> Welch, S.A. A Listening Competence Comparison of Working Professionals. *The International Journal of Listening*. p.86.

<sup>21</sup> Welch, S.A. A Listening Competence Comparison of Working Professionals. *The International Journal of Listening*. p.86.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.psychology-lexicon.com/cms/glossary/38-glossary-e/23660-empathetic-listening.html> accessed 1/5/2024.



## Vi. Therapeutic Listening

This kind of listening “involves emotional understanding whereby the individual often acts as a sounding board, allowing the other person to vent. Here, the individual listens with empathy and understanding.”<sup>23</sup>

In therapeutic listening, the listener empathizes with the speaker and uses this deep connection to help the speaker understand, change, or develop in some way.

## Vii. Dialogic Listening

Dialogic listening orients participants to their joint activity, where each participant's understanding is seen as a co-constructed process. In dialogic listening, the focus is on what is going on between the participants, not what is inside their heads.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, in dialogic listening, one learns through the process of conversation and exchange of ideas and information.

These diverse listening dispositions form the bedrock of synodality. However, each one depends on the context in which it is suited.

## 5. Listening as the Fulcrum of Synodality

The ongoing Synod on synodality emphasizes “mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn.” The faithful people, the priests, the bishop: all listening to each other and to the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of truth” (*Jn* 14:17), in order to know what he “says to us.”<sup>25</sup> All are, therefore, enjoined not to work alone but with the Lord of the vineyard. To walk together in the spirit of the synod, the symphony of voices must be listened to in the orchestra of synodality; each person must be given time to improve. Undoubtedly, “the Church is actually the assembly convoked to give God thanks and glory like a choir, a harmonic reality which holds everything together.”<sup>26</sup>

It is in line with that that the ongoing synod of Bishops centres on communion, participation and mission. Communion ordinarily refers to common sharing and companionship. Still, for a Christian, it has a deeper meaning of recognizing Jesus in the breaking of the bread and equally sharing it with others. If the breaking ends with oneself, it negates what communion stands for. Communion abhors every kind of narrow-mindedness, exclusivity, egocentric

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<sup>23</sup> Welch, S.A. A Listening Competence Comparison of Working Professionals. *The International Journal of Listening*. p.86.

<sup>24</sup> Penman, R. Dialogic listening. *Key Concepts in Intercultural Dialogue*, No. 37.

<sup>25</sup> Francis, *Ceremony commemorating the 50th anniversary of the institution of the synod of bishops*, 17/10/2015.

<sup>26</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the life and mission of the Church*, n.3, 2018.

and discriminatory attitude. It is not meant only for the privileged but also for the marginalized and sinners. "The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak. . . . But the Church is not a tollhouse; it is the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems."<sup>27</sup> All, no matter one's background, must be part of the choir in this synodal engagement.

Sequel to that, participation is all about my involvement and that of others. It cannot be communion if I participate alone, and it cannot be participation if I end up singing outside the choir. Others must be given the chance to enter. Nobody should be locked out. Participation is a move towards realizing the mission of Jesus Christ as Himself announced: bringing good news to the poor, binding up the broken-hearted, and granting liberty to captives (Isaiah 61,1). The last stage in the process of synodality, which is a mission, is all about going out.

To go out of ourselves: our Church compounds . . . our divisiveness and discriminatory attitudes, our arrogance and aggressiveness, our hate and violence. We are called to go forth: to build bridges rather than walls, to heal and not to wound, to love and not to hate! Mission is about journeying together for a common home in which justice, liberty, equality, fraternity, love, joy and peace are the rights of all! The journey will have difficulties – but one must continue walking it – till our pilgrimage here on earth has ended!<sup>28</sup>

It is a mission with a vision that does not allow monkeying about with issues. Fundamentally, the mission entails listening to and obeying the Words of Christ Himself, who calls and sends.

It is important to note that the placement of these buzzwords—Communion, Participation, and Mission—is not casual but meant to evoke meaning in the synod process. It is when we are united in heart and mind through communing with the Lord that we can participate in the mysteries of the

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<sup>27</sup>Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, n.47. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2013.

<sup>28</sup>Prakash, C. "Time to 'renew' Church: Throw open doors and windows, allow fresh air to blow through." <https://www.counterview.net/2021/10/time-to-renew-church-throw-open-doors.html>, accessed 17/9/2024.

faith. These moments have to be carried together, and nobody should be jettisoned out of the boat of synodality; rather, each person has to be guided to sing in the choir.

Importantly, pastors of souls must be ready to listen to the "melody of God in their lives."<sup>29</sup> and in their ministry. Listening summons God's followers to action and reflects their belief in God. They have to remember that the theology of listening is embedded in the Triune God's constant listening and communicating. "God always reveals himself by communicating freely..."<sup>30</sup> Obviously, sound and silence remain "the *loci* of God's self-communication."<sup>31</sup> Listening expects hearing; the vocal sound or the sound of silence makes a positive or negative impact on the listener. In fact, the interplay of the "aural/oral experience of life presents a privileged *locus* for the apprehension of God's revelation."<sup>32</sup> The most resounding salvific listening is evident in God, who listened to the plight of His sinful creatures and communicated to them through the mystery of the incarnation. He indeed communicated Himself through His only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, who came that "we may have life and have it abundantly" (Jn. 10:10).

In prayer, there is an experience of mutual listening. In fact, "prayer is the word you speak to God. When you meditate on the Word of God, God speaks to you; when you pray, you speak to God" (*Oratio tua locutio est ad Deum: quando legis, Deus tibi loquitur; quando oras, Deo loqueris*).<sup>33</sup> Whether God is speaking to you or you are speaking to God, the connecting force is listening. In the Rule of St. Benedict, the first word is: Listen!<sup>34</sup> It is, however, important to listen in order to know when one is called so as to respond responsibly and with unquestionable obedience. To be able to hear Him undoubtedly demands a regular listening encounter with the Lord. It is obvious that good followers and good leaders are distinguished through their matchless disposition to listen. They listen not only to themselves and to others but, above all and more fundamentally, to God. They listen with an open mind to constructive criticism and adjust accordingly, while bad leaders/followers frown aggressively at constructive criticism or even shamelessly go to the extent of punishing those who criticize them. However, "the

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<sup>29</sup>Francis, *Message to the Participants at the Ecumenical Pilgrimage in Rome, "With Luther to the Pope,"* 25/10/2021.

<sup>30</sup>Francis, *Message to 56<sup>th</sup> World Day of Social Communications,* 23/01/2022.

<sup>31</sup>Ni Riain, Noirin, *Theosony: towards a theology of listening,* Dublin: Columba Press, 2011, p.202.

<sup>32</sup>Maeve Louise Heaney, *Recensiones,* in *Gregorianum,* vol. 93, no. 4 (2012), p.885.

<sup>33</sup>Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms,* 85, 7.

<sup>34</sup>Benedict, *Rule of St. Benedict* 1. "Listen carefully, my son, to the master's instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart."

sheep that belong to me listen to my voice," says the Lord, "I know them, and they follow me" (Jn. 10:27). In the pastoral realm, pastors of souls are leaders by their vocation and have to be always ready to listen to themselves in their fraternal sharing of experience of the fallouts in their pastoral engagement. To that effect, pastors of souls, in the words of St. Augustine, are undoubtedly barren, and they preach the word of God outwardly without listening to it inwardly.<sup>35</sup>

Following from that, the *Christifideles* must be constantly fed and nourished with the word of God. Nevertheless, they cannot be fed with the word if they are bereft of a listening disposition. However, they must listen to His word in order to translate them to a deeper listening to the deeper challenges buffeting their neighbours. Indeed, "a correct exercise of synodality must contribute to a better articulation of the ministry of the personal and collegial exercise of apostolic authority with the synodal exercise of discernment on the part of the community."<sup>36</sup>

## **6. The Power of Prayer in Synodality**

Prayer is a crucial part of the synodal process. In the words of Cardinal Grech, the synod is "an event of prayer and listening that involves ... every baptized person and every particular Church."<sup>37</sup> During his public life, Jesus constantly availed himself of the power of prayer. The Gospels show this to us when he retired to secluded places to pray. These are sober and discreet observations that allow us only to imagine those prayerful dialogues. They clearly demonstrate, however, that even at times of greater dedication to the poor and the sick, Jesus never neglected his intimate dialogue with the Father. The more he was immersed in the needs of the people, the more he felt the need to repose in the Trinitarian Communion, to return to the Father and the Spirit.<sup>38</sup>

If our Lord and Master was in the habit of stealing time to pray, what about his followers? They did not call themselves; He called them. They are not working for themselves; they are working for Him. If they are truly working for Him and not for themselves, they must follow His footsteps. They must allow Him to guide them. For, "when Jesus prays, he is already teaching us how to pray."<sup>39</sup> Let them

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<sup>35</sup> Augustine, *Sermons* 179,1. In Rotelle J.E. (ed.), *The Works of St. Augustine*, New York: New City Press, p.298.

<sup>36</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the life and mission of the Church*, n.69, 2018.

<sup>37</sup> Grech, M. Cardinal Grech invites everyone to pray for upcoming Synod.

<https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2023-09/cardinal-mario-grech-invitation-episcopate-priests-prayer-synod.html>

<sup>38</sup> Francis, *General audience, Catechesis on Prayer*. 4/11/2020.

<sup>39</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, n. 2607.

remember that "Prayer is the *rudder that guides Jesus' course*." The stages of their mission were not dictated by success, consensus, or the seductive phrase "everyone is searching for you."<sup>40</sup> Through prayer, the pastors of souls spiritually nourish their lives, surmount seemingly insurmountable situations, and ooze out with a contagious spiritual aroma that draws people nearer to God. It therefore goes without saying that consistent prayer produces progressive transformation, makes them strong in times of tribulation, and gives them the grace to be supported by the One who loves them and always protects them.<sup>41</sup>

### **7. Diversity of Roles but unity of Doctrine in Synodality**

It is an indubitable fact that "in the synodal Church the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called together to pray, listen, analyze, dialogue, discern and offer advice on taking pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God's will."<sup>42</sup> The evident diversity of the persons notwithstanding, they are called by the same Master and work in the same vineyard, which is the Church. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* graphically paints this image thus:

The Church is a cultivated field, the tillage of God. On that land, the ancient olive tree grows whose holy roots were the prophets and in which the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles has been brought about and will be brought about again. That land, like a choice vineyard, has been planted by the heavenly cultivator. Yet the true vine is Christ who gives life and fruitfulness to the branches, that is, to us, who through the Church remain in Christ, without whom we can do nothing.<sup>43</sup>

It is He who says, "You go into the vineyard, too." It is an invitation to work and not leisure. Indeed, the common denominator of all the labourers is that they worked according to the mind of the Master and not according to their personal interests. Labourers of every category in the Church must aim to maintain unity of doctrine. It is such unity of doctrine that followers of Christ are called to maintain in their various areas of apostolate. Through adherence to sound doctrine, the local church is bonded with the universal Church. In fact, the more an individual Church is attached to the universal Church by solid bonds of communion, charity and loyalty, in receptiveness to the Magisterium of Peter, in

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<sup>40</sup> Francis, *General audience, Catechesis on Prayer*. 4/11/2020

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the life and mission of the Church*, n.68, 2018.

<sup>43</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* n.755.

the unity of the *lex orandi*, which is also the *lex credendi*, in the desire for unity with all the other Churches which make up the whole- the more such a Church will be capable of translating the treasure of faith into the legitimate variety of expressions of the profession of faith, prayer and worship, of Christian life and conduct and of the spiritual influence on the people among which it dwells.<sup>44</sup>

It is not a personal doctrine subject to any wind of change; rather, it is a universal doctrine that needs to be updated through personal studies and ongoing formation. The true doctrine has to be preserved in season and out of season. Consequently, the pastors of souls must remain truly prophetic in words and deeds and shun any tendency to commercialise the gospel for sordid money or put on the cloak of false prophets who, without having received the gift of prophecy from God and not possessed of the fear of God, but either for the sake of vainglory, or with a view to some personal advantage, or acting in some other way under the influence of a wicked spirit, pretend to utter prophecies, while all the time they lie against God.<sup>45</sup>

The spreading of the true Good News demands true knowledge, which is founded on the doctrine of the apostles, the ancient constitution of the Church throughout all the world, and the distinctive manifestation of the body of Christ according to the successions of the bishops, by which they have handed down that Church which exists in every place and has come even unto us, being guarded and preserved without any forging of Scriptures, by a very complete system of doctrine, and neither receiving addition nor curtailment in the truths which she believes.<sup>46</sup>

## **8. Conclusion**

The sending of labourers into the vineyard connotes the Church that is not self-referential or closed up, but rather a Church that is regularly on the move and not tired of inviting new labourers to join in the walking together for the growth of the body, the Church. Being a Church in motion, everybody cannot enter at the same time. Some will enter early; others will enter very late. But the Church as mother characteristically listens and is ready to welcome all.

In the same vein, "a synodal Church promotes the renewal of attitude of listening, consulting, dialoguing, discerning, welcoming, and exchanging ideas and, above all, affirming the participation of all the members of the People of God.

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<sup>44</sup>Paul VI, *Evangelii Nuntiandi* n.64.

<sup>45</sup>Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 4,33.6 Roberts A., et al. (ed.), *The ante-Nicene Fathers* Vol.1, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996.

<sup>46</sup>Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 4,33.8.

The Church is called to operate synodically at the local, regional, and universal levels.”<sup>47</sup> “The renewal of the Church's synodal life demands that we initiate processes for consulting the entire People of God.”<sup>48</sup> All in all, it is of great importance to remember that “the word Synod from which synodality is derived conveys the idea of a journey undertaken together, listening to the Holy Spirit and to the voices of all segments of the faithful, where decisions are made collectively, dialogue promoted, and active participation encouraged.”<sup>49</sup> In this way, faith is enhanced.

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<sup>47</sup> Spadaro, A., “Synodal Church”, *La Civiltà Cattolica*: Union of Catholic Asia News, 2022. Accessed: 02/05/2022. <https://www.laciviltacatolica.com/the-synodal-church>

<sup>48</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the life and mission of the Church*, n.65, 2018.

<sup>49</sup> Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria, *Journeying together for the common good in the Church and our nation. A Communiqué issued at the end of the First Plenary Meeting of the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) at the Catholic Secretariat of Nigeria Resource Centre, Durumi, Abuja, 16 to 22 February 2024.*