

12th General Congregation. Overview presented by Vatican News



#SinodoAmazonico

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Pope Francis attended the 12th and final General Congregation of the Synod of Bishops on Tuesday afternoon. There were 173 Synod Fathers present. On Wednesday morning, Synod participants return to working in the small language groups. Their work will be presented to the assembly on Thursday afternoon, 17 October.

The Amazonian world wants a Church that is allied to it. The Synod participants were reminded that the Church cannot speak of the poor while forgetting that the people are being crucified. That would be committing the sin of indifference, of omission. The Church is called to take up the cry of the people and of the earth, with the Gospel as her point of departure. This is the only way that she will assume the countenance of the Good Samaritan, will become missionary, capable of defending the least, without being afraid of the possibility of martyrdom. "It is better to die fighting for life, than to live for death", as one person boldly stated. Thus the Synod continued its journey with a reminder that came up in several interventions to leave space for the abundant outpouring of the Holy Spirit rather than remaining closed in by functional solutions.

No to victimization, more co-responsibility

The populations in several of the more vulnerable regions of Amazon see themselves as having often been abandoned. One example are street children. The Church is called to help them to boost their self-esteem, to prevent them from becoming victims. In the end, this too is a risk because it is not solving the underlying problems. The region itself is undeniably a victim of abuse. What is truly necessary, it was noted, is to help the people themselves feel co-responsible for the construction of their own destiny. Believers, therefore, should be at the forefront of reclaiming their rights and assuming the obligation of living simply and hopefully as they journey toward the Kingdom promised by God to His children.

Fundamental contribution of science for the care of creation

The cry for help arising both from the people and from the earth involves a response from everyone. Believers are called to recognize the value of every creature. In fact, care for our Common Home is rooted in the Christian vocation. Action is a must on the part of individuals, communities and the world. A disinterested response is not possible. The future of entire generations is at stake. Protecting the Amazon from man-made destruction is a responsibility that touches all of humanity. Thus arose the appeal for a global response to climate change through the creation of an entity that would coordinate scientists and academics on the international level with the Pontifical Academy of Sciences. The hope was also expressed that greater work be undertaken in the field of education to sensitize the public regarding the care of our Common Home. It was even proposed that a new Canon –an ecological

canon – be added to the Code of Canon Law which would treat the duties of Christians regarding the environment.

Putting out into the deep for a profound ecological conversion

The Church's appeal is that of putting out into the deep, assuming the call for a profound ecological, synodal, and complete conversion to Christ and His Gospel. Walking together as a universal family is the invitation now being extended, within the conviction that the Amazon region does not belong to either the States or those who govern them. They are, rather, administrators and they must be accountable of what they are doing.

Through the daily gift of self made by the laity – consecrated or married – the Church as “sacrament” will be truly formed in Amazonia, and will manifest the presence of Christ in that region. The need was expressed for a spirituality and a sacramental theology capable of allowing itself to be challenged by the lived experience of the communities and the gifts which they have already received. In this regard, the work already undertaken to coordinate efforts at the level of the local church (such as REPAM) was encouraged.

Symmetry of relations

An intercultural dialogue inspired by the Spirit of Pentecost was also highlighted. The invitation is to let go of the habit of imposing or of appropriating in order to embrace, what was termed, a “symmetry of relations”. Humility was named as the attitude necessary for such a dialogue, founded on the common conviction of being co-responsible in the care of the Common Home. What is not possible alone can be done together. This requires the urgent construction of an inclusive “we”, in which every person, although each is different, is necessary precisely because each is different. Thus the proposal for the creation of formative processes in intercultural dialogue in which theory can be tested by praxis.

The drama of priestless communities

Once again, the Synod participants were reminded about the realistic drama of the many communities, an estimated 70% in the Amazon region, that are visited by a priest only once or twice each year. They are deprived of the sacraments, of the Word of God, of those celebrations so central to the Christian life, such as Easter, Pentecost, Christmas. Some choose to frequent other Christian denominations so as not to remain in the condition of “sheep without a shepherd”. The universal Church cannot remain indifferent to this situation. Courageous choices, open to the voice of the Spirit, need to be made. It was also pointed out how fundamental it is to pray to the “Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into His harvest”. The pastoral care of the people of God is “first and foremost the concern of the Lord”, one Synod Father stated. Thus we must ask Him for the solutions.

Mission: in the footsteps of Jesus

It seems to some that the passion for mission has faded in the most remote areas. Some areas are heavily affected by the consequences provoked by large, unsustainable mining projects: illness (some of which are non-curable), drug trafficking, loss of identity. The international community needs to be exhorted not to invest in industrial projects that provoke harm and illness to the surrounding populations. In addition, the Amazon needs missionaries, for they are the only ones that the local populations still trust.

One such missionary effort that was spoken of is the precious contribution of itinerant missionary teams inspired by Jesus who visited village after village without stopping, without even having a place to stay. This provides a model for the Church always “on the move”, leaving behind a pastoral ministry meant to preserve the past to one that is creative. Certain structures, it was noted, are already obsolete and are in desperate need of updating. We can no longer be “obsolete” while the rest of the world moves ahead. The Gospel, in fact, always has something new to say. This too is a part of the ecological conversion. Openness to new forms of ministry means the incorporation of women and young people.

Migrants in the cities, torn from their territories

The Church is called to enter into the everyday lives of men and women—collegially and synodally. Once again, the topic of migrants w—those uprooted and transplanted in the cities – was brought to the attention of those in the Hall. There in the cities, they are forced to confront strong contrasting situations: political, social, economic, the existential void, exasperated individualism. Making the Gospel present there is a duty, and in this way, the city becomes a place for mission and sanctification.

It was therefore recommended that a specific pastoral ministry be promoted in this context which considers the indigenous migrants as the protagonist. The connection of the land with a particular people as expressed in the Bible helps understand the gravity of tearing a people from their own territory. Defending their territory is of utmost importance both for the Amazonian biome and for the way of life of the local populations. In this sense, an “intransigent defense” of the indigenous peoples was recommended. This includes the right to their own culture, their own theology, their own religion – these are riches that need to be safeguarded in the interest of all humanity.

Finally, the problem of food was brought up. With its fresh water, the Amazon could contribute in reducing hunger in the world. In fact, 26% of the world’s fresh water comes from this region. Due to this fact, one person suggested that sustainable projects should be encouraged.

At the end of the 12th General Congregation, just before the part dedicated to spontaneous interventions, Pope Francis asked to speak. When he had finished, those in the Hall watched a film about the floating hospital named after Pope Francis which was inaugurated this past August. This hospital serves two purposes: that of bringing the Gospel and health care to hundreds of thousands living in the Brazilian State of Parà along the Amazon River who can only be reached by river.

Source: Vatican News