

3rd General Congregation. Overview presented by Vatican News



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#SinodoAmazonico. Defence of human rights and the urgency of formation at the heart of the 3rd General Congregation

The Third General Congregation of the Synod of Bishops gathered on the morning of Tuesday 8th October, in the presence of Pope Francis and continued with the interventions arising from the Instrumentum Laboris. In total, 183 Synod Fathers were present in the Synod Hall.

Vatican News – Città del Vaticano

This morning in the Synod Hall during the 3rd General Congregation of the Special Synod for the Pan-Amazon Region the following topics were discussed by the Synod Participants; the defence of human rights, the drama of the criminalisation of leaders, as well as an examination of various communities and social movements. The number of martyrs in the Amazon region is truly frightening. Between 2003-2017, the number of indigenous who died defending their land totalled a staggering 1119. Added to this tragedy is the fact that social leaders are often the victims of those who act with impunity along with States lacking sufficient power to guarantee the safety of their people. Through this optic, it was reiterated that the Church must defend those who are far from their lands or lack sufficient means for protection. It is suggested that where these protections do not yet exist, maybe then at the diocesan level, certain efforts of permanent actions of solidarity and social justice may help to improve the situation. The work of the church, as it has been repeated many times, is to raise her voice against such projects that destroy the environment. At the same time, the Synod Fathers have made clear the importance of promoting a political environment that is more participatory, as well as an economy far removed from a 'culture of waste.' All this aims at promoting an experience of an alternative economy, such as those of small cooperatives that deal directly with the products of the forest, without going through a large production.

The struggle against predatory extractive models

In the Synod Hall the following issues were discussed; the contamination of rivers in which often is dumped the waste of active mines, the problem of deforestation, a menace evermore present in the Amazon, the massive sale of timber, the cultivation of cocoa, legislation that weakens the environment and fails to safeguard the richness and natural beauty of the territory. Regarding this point, the Church is called upon to denounce corruption of predatory extractive models, as well as

those which are illegal and violent in nature. The Church is thus called to promote international norms that protect human, social and environmental rights. Thus the cry of pain from the earth which has been looted as well as the cry of those people who suffer in like manner living in the same land. The defence of the original peoples is remembered and witnessed by the martyrdom of many missionaries that have given their lives for indigenous causes and for the protection of those who have been exploited and persecuted by the menace of those things which are euphemistically passed off as 'development projects.'

Amazon, land of migration

The Synod reflected also on the theme of migration, be it of Indigenous people moving to urban areas, or those people who cross the Amazon to reach other countries. From this phenomenon arises an important pastoral issue specific to the Church. The Amazon region as a zone of migration flows, in fact is in a real state of emergency, as noted in the Synod Hall. Thus we are confronted with a new missionary call in an inter-ecclesial sense, wherein a major collaboration is called for between local churches and other sectors involved in this area. It must be kept in mind however that this drama of migration also touches upon the youth of the Amazon, forced to leave their homelands which are more and more challenged by the problems of unemployment, violence against human beings, drug trafficking, prostitution, and other forms exploitation. It is necessary therefore that the Church recognise, value, sustain and strengthen the participation of the youth of the Amazon in ecclesial, social, and political spaces, because the youth are 'the profits of hope.'

The urgency of formation

Subsequently the Synod reflected upon the importance of communion in the Church that includes in a large part the laity, so that they may be supported in the contribution to the work of the Church. The complexity of modern life in fact, calls upon certain competencies and skills which are not always the expertise or the domain of priests. As this is the case before so many current challenges, (secularism, religious indifference, the rapid proliferation of evangelical churches) the Church must learn to consult and hear the voice of the laity. Respecting the value of the laity at the centre of this conversation thus turns to the problem of the priestly shortage and the difficult question of how to bring the Eucharist to the laity. It is necessary therefore, to move from a 'pastoral visit' to a 'pastoral presence,' recognising new charisms that are found in lay movements, which have a certain potential once recognised and reflected upon. From this reflection the place of celibacy as a great gift of the Holy Spirit has been repeated. At the same time some Synod Fathers have raised the question of ordaining married men, *virii probati*, valuing what may be in time the validity of such an experience. In contrast, one of the Synod of the Fathers maintains that this proposition would reduce such a priest to being a simple functionary of the Mass and not, instead, a true pastor of the community, a master of the Christian life, and a concrete presence of the closeness of Christ to his people.

New paths for ministry

Arising from various needs facing pastors and the work of evangelisation in the Amazon, not only is it important to place renewed value on the contribution of consecrated life, but also a strong promotion of indigenous vocations. This promotion of indigenous vocations is included in the proposal of choosing certain people to be authorised as ministers able to celebrate the Eucharist, or, to ordain permanent deacons who, in a manner adequate to the task, might, accompanied by pastors, be able to administer the sacraments. Another point of reflection is that of the formation of ordained ministers envisaged on three levels. Firstly, a detailed formation at the parish level, with the reading and meditation on the Word of God. Secondly, an intense and full-time formation, aimed at animators of the community. Thirdly, a systematic theological formation for candidates for Holy Orders, as well as for men and women who desire to commit themselves to lay ministry. As underlined in the Synod Hall, it is important that the formation of seminarians be re-thought so as to develop a formation that is closer to the reality of the lives of those they shall serve in the community. Amongst these various propositions is also the call to examine the possibility of the ordination of women to the diaconate so as to recognise their ecclesial vocation.

