

Building up the Body of Christ in Love and Forming Joyful Disciples to Share the Good News

Region XIII Synod 2021 – 2023 Report

Introduction

Region XIII consists of the Archdioceses of Denver and Santa Fe, and the Dioceses of Cheyenne, Colorado Springs, Gallup, Las Cruces, Phoenix, Pueblo, Salt Lake City, and Tucson. Variations in geography, from the reddish-brown deserts of New Mexico to the high elevations of Wyoming and Colorado and from the volcanic mountain ranges of Arizona to the sand dunes of Utah, symbolize this region's diversity. The people are as varied as the lands on which they live, with different histories, cultures, and languages.

Among Region XIII (arch)dioceses are two mission dioceses with the smallest Catholic populations in the region: Diocese of Cheyenne ~50,000 and Gallup ~66,000. The Diocese of Phoenix serves approximately 1.1 million Catholics, while the remaining (arch)dioceses serve between ~200,000 and ~600,000 Catholics. The People of God in two of the dioceses, Cheyenne and Salt Lake City, are spread across their entire states. The Diocese of Salt Lake City measures 84,931 square miles, with parishes located in several metropolitan locales, as well as in low population or rural areas. The Diocese of Cheyenne comprises 36 parishes and numerous mission churches that stretch across 97,814 square miles. New Mexico, including the Archdiocese of Santa Fe and the Dioceses of Las Cruces and Gallup, with its 500-year-old history of inculturation with Native, Spanish, Mexican, and Anglo presence, enjoys a strong Catholic identity consisting in art, music, Native and Hispanic religious traditions, local Feast days, Los Hermanos Penitentes, *Las Posadas*, Santos, pilgrimages, retablos, Church adobe architecture, monasteries, and abbeys.

Despite these geographical, cultural, and demographic distinctions across Region XIII, the People of God throughout these five states initially reacted to Synod 2021 – 2023 in similar fashion. Participant statements in (arch)diocesan reports vacillated between gratitude for the opportunity to speak out and be listened to and a concern that input from the laity would be ignored or misrepresented. Several participants expressed suspicion that the entire process is effectively a cover for pre-determined conclusions, touching on the life and teachings of the Church. One report notes, “There is a concern that Pope Francis and other pastors [sic.] are ready to contradict the established teaching of the Church under the guise of a new ‘movement’ of the Holy Spirit.” Some reports spoke of a desire of the People of God that the Synod result in changes; reflecting the polarization of our society, participants did not agree on what those changes should be.

Methodology and philosophies by which (arch)dioceses conducted Synod 2021 – 2023 differed. Both the Diocese of Cheyenne and the Diocese of Gallup conducted in-person listening sessions and did not employ the use of electronic surveys. Across the region, overall participation varied but not as robust as desired. In many cases, continued fears of contracting COVID-19 were cited as the reason for lack of participation. Some areas were successful in bringing people together for discernment, and those (arch)dioceses that chose to use surveys gathered more data than others.

Throughout Region XIII (arch)diocesan reports, the People of God in their beautiful diversity revealed a unified desire to be led by the Holy Spirit as companions on the journey. Comments that support this assertion include “Prayer and devotion to the Holy Spirit must be a centerpiece in the life of the ‘journey together’”; “With the Holy Spirit we can keep things in balance, focused on [C]atholic education based on God’s beauty and the grace that He gives us”; “During the Covid lockdowns[,] the office staff called every parishioner to see if they were okay and needed help or prayers. Many people felt very cared for[,] and the

office reaching out kept them close and gave them a strong sense of community. Many expressed that this is why they feel welcome and loved”; “The Church must offer greater hope, [which articulates] a gift of the Holy Spirit.” “We are called to walk together, but not many of us do.”

Commentary by certain groups of participants underscore the dynamics in our Church at times mirror those present in our divided culture and society at large. These comments include perceptions that bishops don’t agree on Church doctrine; the influence secular partisan politics has on Catholics; polarization over the continued use of the Roman Missal of 1962 (aka, Traditional Latin Mass); unhealed wounds and cynicism toward the Church as a result of the sexual-abuse scandals and Church leadership’s initial failed response; disagreement about how to accompany those who identify as LGBTQ; confusion about the principles of Catholic Social Teaching; disagreement with Church teaching about birth control and abortion, women’s roles in the Church, and celibacy for priests; and an overarching theme that Catholics lack adequate faith formation in all areas and among all ages. This commentary highlights the challenges present in walking together as Catholics and to unity in the faith.

Other significant themes woven throughout Region XIII (arch)diocesan reports include worry that youth are leaving the Church; a need to journey more deeply with our sisters and brothers who share our common baptism, as well as to develop beneficial relationships with our Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and non-religious brothers and sisters; a longing to bring home those who have left the Church; a desire to integrate Catholics who speak different languages and have unique cultures and to reach out to those who are on the margins (nominal Catholics, Latinos, homeless and homebound people, youth, and the elderly); a longing for a stronger sense of community in parishes; a call for more transparency from Church leadership (parish, diocesan, and universal Church levels) in decision making; and a need for improved communication—public, internal, and interpersonal.

The Region XIII writing team gathered to discuss the contents of (arch)diocesan reports and to determine how primary concerns and desires expressed by those who participated in Synod 2021 – 2023 could best be addressed. The team agreed that three crucial areas of life in the Church demand attention and are an umbrella for the multiple issues that surfaced in the Synodal Listening Sessions, gatherings, and surveys.

In the following pages, we will explore those three areas, consisting of: (1) A Spirit of Welcome and Genuine Companionship as Children of God, (2) The Importance of Eucharist in the Lives of the Faithful, and (3) Faith Formation and Evangelization. In each section, a call for further discernment is indicated by text in italics, as we continue to ask what the Holy Spirit is calling the Mystical Body of Christ to do in response to primary concerns expressed by those who participated in Synod 2021 – 2023.

1. A Spirit of Welcome and Genuine Companionship as Children of God

Throughout Region XIII synodal reports, the People of God express a hunger to feel the embrace of God through charity and companionship extended by and to their sisters and brothers in Christ. This desire is hindered, however, by experiences of the Church as critical, judgmental, and inhospitable. One diocesan report notes, “...a wide category of individuals, both Catholics and non-Catholics...for some specific circumstance or situation no longer attend, or do not ‘feel worthy’ to enter one of our churches.”

Sisters and brothers who have left the Church or feel unwelcome and/or unworthy reveal unhealed wounds and distrust due to post-Vatican II misunderstandings (including issues with the Latin Mass); sexual-abuse scandals and Church leadership’s initial failed response; an inability to obtain a marriage annulment after

divorce or to baptize a child whose parents are in an “irregular” relationship; and perceived unwelcoming attitudes toward divorced persons and those who identify as LGBTQ. Other statements that illustrate this uninviting image of the Church include: “Christ ran with the outcasts. Our Churches can be anything but Christ-like”; “The Church needs to move from exclusion to inclusion and reach out to those who are seeking”; “The Church should be a place of hospitality and openness to all just like Jesus was. All of us in the Church need to show more love and kindness”; “The Church should be the safest place to show up as we are, messy as we are, and not feel judged or inferior.” *These comments reveal a woundedness that merits continued discernment on how to invite back to the Church those who have left and how to heal their wounds that all might experience abundant life. Inclusiveness is not opposed to faithfulness when the virtue of charity abounds. Our faith should not move to the lowest common denominator, rather we should elevate our faith in living charitably and drawing all peoples to God.*

People hunger for the embrace of God within the Church, yet some feel unwelcome. As Pope Pius XII wrote, “the social structure of the Christian community, though it proclaims the wisdom of its divine Architect, still remains something inferior when compared to the spiritual gifts which give it beauty and life, and to the divine source whence they flow” (Mystici Corporis Christi, n. 63). The Spirit is calling the Church to renewal as expressed in Lumen Gentium, n. 8: “Christ was sent by the Father “to bring good news to the poor...” (Lk. 4:18), “to seek and save what was lost (Lk. 19:10). Similarly, the Church encompasses with her love all those who are afflicted by human misery... The Church, embracing in its bosom sinners, at the same time holy and always in need of being purified, always follows the way of penance and renewal...” Recognizing the inherent dignity of one another as children of God and members of the Mystical Body of Christ is the path to genuine companionship and mutual charity. Simple behaviors, such as learning each other’s names, reaching out to “fallen away Catholics” or those on the margins, and supporting youth and their families, become an expression of “the mysterious and real communion between Christ’s own body and ours” (CCC, n. 787), and that becomes a sign of love to a wounded world.

“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (Jn. 13:35).

Love toward one another also is revealed when members of the Mystical Body of Christ take seriously their co-responsibility in building up the Body. One diocesan report comments, “How these activities [parish gatherings and opportunities to volunteer] come about from their inception, planning, and execution are a very telling indication of healthiness in the community. The pastor’s ability to make things happen is unfortunately often seen as the measure of success in the functioning of a parish. Our activity and the intentionality and motivation behind it should come from the ground up, i.e.[.] from the parishioners and not just the pastor or parish council.” *When the People of God are coworkers in the vineyard who accept their share of “Christ’s mission, joys, and sufferings” (CCC, n. 787), parishes become vibrant places of worship and service, maintained by parishioners who understand the connection between the Eucharistic Celebration and The Sending.*

Differences in cultures, languages, generations, ecclesiology, and political ideologies are identified as obstacles to genuine companionship in (arch)diocesan reports. One diocesan report writes, “Language and cultural barriers are a very real challenge. Predominately English and Spanish define the divide, but other languages and cultures are evident. In the healthiest communities, the activity and life of the parish sees a generous blending of the different cultures and languages.” *Where these diversities exist, parishes should recall that “...the unity of the Mystical Body triumphs over all human divisions” (CCC, n. 814). “So in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26-28). In secular society, differences lead to division, but the Church is called to be a leaven of reconciliation through the witness of mercy, just as the Father is merciful (Lk. 6:36).*

Communication: A Dimension of Love

Throughout Region XIII (arch)diocesan reports, a prevalent theme concerns interpersonal communication. One participant notes, “We live in a divisive culture and time, people don’t know how to talk and listen to each other[;] don’t we bear some responsibility for this? We need to find a way to live together harmoniously.” A diocesan report comments, “We need to find common ground, and better see our communication and dialoguing [with] others as a tool for building up the Body of Christ and outreach ministry.” Another diocesan report writes, “People want more opportunities for genuine in-person conversations, mutual dialogue and exchange of faith stories, so that relationships might grow into fellowship. In this way, the community can better love and support its members, who can be there for each other and give of themselves in imitation of Christ.”

Regarding the core element of respectful communication—intentional listening—some participants admitted that people do not engage with people with whom they disagree; they have no desire to listen to those who challenge their worldview, secular politics, or interpretation of Church teaching. According to (arch)diocesan reports, some Catholics believe that Church leadership does not listen to the laity. One participant states, “When people feel no one is listening to them, that their voice is not heard or ignored, they feel they are no longer a part of the Church.”

Authentic interpersonal communication is essential to developing friendships, but many people do not know how to “find common ground” or “talk and listen to each other.” Intentional listening is not a passive activity. Pope Francis calls us to listen with the “ear of the heart.” In his message for the 56th World Day of Social Communications, he writes, “On the one hand, then, God always reveals himself by communicating freely; and on the other hand, man and woman are asked to tune in, to be willing to listen. The Lord explicitly calls the human person to a covenant of love, so that they can fully become what they are: the image and likeness of God in his capacity to listen, to welcome, to give space to others. Fundamentally, listening is a dimension of love.”

Some people also do not know that they always are communicating, not only with words, which are inherently symbolic, but also with paralinguistic (word emphasis, vocal tone and pitch), and facial expressions, as well as other nonverbal cues (body orientation, posture, gestures, etc.). Even language barriers can be broken down with a nod and a smile. When members of the Mystical Body of Christ share faith and life stories and intentionally listen to one another, they become a body that is “... linked together in such a way as to help one another. And as in the body when one member suffers, all the other members share its pain, and the healthy members come to the assistance of the ailing, so in the Church the individual members do not live for themselves alone, but also help their fellows, and all work in mutual collaboration for the common comfort and for the more perfect building up of the whole Body” (Mystici Corporis Christi, n. 15).

2. The Importance of the Eucharist in the Lives of the Faithful

Central to building up the Mystical Body of Christ is the Eucharist. “If you, therefore, are Christ’s body and members, it is your own mystery that is placed on the Lord’s table! It is your own mystery that you are receiving! You are saying ‘Amen’ to what you are: your response is a personal signature, affirming your faith” (*Augustine on the Nature of the Sacrament of the Eucharist*, Sermon 272).

Having endured many months without consistent in-person celebration of the Mass due to COVID-19, Region XIII Synodal insights reflect the importance and centrality of the Eucharist in the lives of the People of God. Comments also illustrate love of and appreciation for the privilege to gather once more and worship communally. While cherishing the joy of the Eucharist, the faithful also reveal areas of concern,

namely a longing for the Mass to be a source of unity, preaching that reflects the day-to-day struggles of those in the pews, and the need for greater formation to deepen the understanding of the Eucharist.

The Eucharist as a Source of Unity

In these fractious times, evidence of unity in many areas of the country is sorely lacking. The Church, as the community of believers, is no exception. Synod participants called for the Eucharist, as the source and summit of our faith, to be the focal point of unity among Catholics, while they seek greater clarity in our understanding and practice.

Some Region XIII reports convey concern over the differences in how the Mass is celebrated across (arch)dioceses, that this is a source of division for at least some parishes and schools, and that some parishioners feel they are “judged” for “picking a side,” in reference to the Latin Mass. Many reports also express reverence and appreciation for the Eucharist and its centrality in the Catholic faith.

While the People of God long for a true communion that can only begin through Christ as we know him in the Eucharist, a sufficient percentage of participants reported obstacles to community within their parishes, partly due to the divisive political climate and resulting polarization in the country. A significant percentage of participants also indicate that receiving Eucharist does bring them more closely in solidarity with the poor. Suggestions on building communion around the Eucharist include items such as warmer hospitality, healing services, and more invigorating preaching by clergy.

In Desiderio Desideravi, Pope Francis invites us to find the remedy to the division by rediscovering the meaning and effect of the Liturgy as expressed in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, particularly in Sacrosanctum Concilium when he writes: “We owe to the Council — and to the liturgical movement that preceded it — the rediscovery of a theological understanding of the Liturgy and of its importance in the life of the Church. As the general principles spelled out in Sacrosanctum Concilium have been fundamental for the reform of the liturgy, they continue to be fundamental for the promotion of that full, conscious, active, and fruitful celebration (cf. Sacrosanctum Concilium, nn. 11; 14), in the liturgy ‘the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit’ (Sacrosanctum Concilium, n. 14). With this letter I simply want to invite the whole Church to rediscover, to safeguard, and to live the truth and power of the Christian celebration. I want the beauty of the Christian celebration and its necessary consequences for the life of the Church not to be spoiled by a superficial and foreshortened understanding of its value or, worse yet, by its being exploited in service of some ideological vision, no matter what the hue. The priestly prayer of Jesus at the Last Supper that all may be one (Jn 17:21) judges every one of our divisions around the Bread broken, around the sacrament of mercy, the sign of unity, the bond of charity... Let us abandon our polemics to listen together to what the Spirit is saying to the church. Let us safeguard our communion. Let us continue to be astonished at the beauty of the liturgy” (Desiderio Desideravi, nn. 16, 65).

Enhance the Quality of Homilies to Prepare the People of God for Mission

The church is a gathering of those who have responded to God’s call into a covenant relationship; it is the place where the word of God is sustained and safeguarded and from which it is proclaimed. The proclamation of the Gospel, then, belongs to the whole of God’s people. “Indeed, the proclamation of the Word of God is the responsibility of the entire Christian community by virtue of the sacrament of baptism.” (Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly, p. 2). While all the Baptized, strengthened by Confirmation and nourished in the Eucharist, have the responsibility to give witness to the Word of God, participants in the Synod process affirmed the unique and key role of the homilist within the Eucharist.

Comments supporting this include: “The importance of good preaching during Mass takes the message of the Gospel and makes it practical and real for the people who are gathered”; “The preaching of the Deacon can sometimes be closer to the experience of the people in the pew. Preaching inspires people to go out and do what the Mass is asking of us”; “Homilies can influence decisions for us as individuals and as families and members of the parish community, but they must be well prepared and inclusive”; “Homilies help people incorporate the Mass into their own life outside the church building. Homilies that are well thought-out and shared well by our homilist builds our faith and the desire to fulfill our faith through action.”

Synod 2021 - 2023 participants understand and are calling for clergy who preach the homily to fulfill its primary purpose once more: “The homily is preached in order that the community of believers who have gathered to celebrate the liturgy may do so more deeply and more fully—more faithfully—and thus be formed for Christian witness in the world. (Fulfilled in Your Hearing: The Homily in the Sunday Assembly, p. 18)

“When preaching takes place within the context of the liturgy, it is part of the offering made to the Father and a mediation of the grace which Christ pours out during the celebration. This context demands that preaching should guide the assembly, and the preacher, to a life-changing communion with Christ in the Eucharist. This means that the words of the preacher must be measured, so that the Lord, more than his minister, will be the center of attention” (Evangelii Gaudium, n. 138).

Improved Formation to Understand and Live the Eucharist

The synodal process surfaced the desire of the Baptized to grow in their understanding of the Eucharist. While the Eucharist is central to the identity of Catholics, so many are confused or unformed as to why this is so. Participants wondered how the Eucharist is relevant in the lives of the faithful struggling with the pressures of the modern world. Clearly, the People of God long to understand and embrace, deeply and fully, the beauty of the Eucharist.

The Faithful long for instruction that is clear, accessible, and appropriately respectful of its adult members. Participants note, “Formation in the liturgy extends to understanding and living what we celebrate. Knowledge of the liturgy is important. But it should lead to elevated prayers, spirituality, and a deepening of the Word within us”; “The church needs to be more educated about the Mass. Parishioners have gotten into the habit of just attending Mass without understanding each part and how it is relevant to our daily life.”

The struggle to promote the Catholic Faith and invite others to join was more frequently mentioned. Group discussions surfaced the following desires: the possibilities of personal growth and understanding the richness of the Eucharist, a deeper understanding of the sacraments of Baptism and Reconciliation as they relate to the Eucharist, more opportunities for people, especially youth, to encounter Jesus personally in adoration, gatherings across the (arch)dioceses to bring Eucharistic communion into sharper focus, the possibilities of inviting others, including fallen away Catholics, into the Eucharistic fold.

In his Apostolic Exhortation Desiderio Desideravi, Pope Francis urges all the faithful to pursue sound and continuous liturgical formation in the Eucharist. He writes, “It was and is necessary to find the channels for a formation that is the study of Liturgy. From the beginning of the liturgical movement much has been done in this regard, with precious contributions from scholars and academic institutions. Nonetheless, it is important now to spread this knowledge beyond the academic environment, in an accessible way, so that each one of the faithful might grow in a knowledge of the theological sense of the Liturgy. This is the decisive question, and it grounds every kind of understanding and every liturgical practice...For ministers, as well as for the baptized, liturgical formation in this first sense is not something that can be acquired once and for all. Since the gift of the

mystery celebrated surpasses our capacity to know it, this effort certainly must accompany formation for everyone, with the humility of little ones, the attitude that opens up in wonder” (nn. 35, 38).

While the faithful expressed a longing to understand the Eucharist, perhaps there is a deeper desire that was not articulated due to a lack of formation. Understanding typically connotes a cognitive experience, but do people have a heartfelt longing to experience the mystery of the Eucharist (and other sacraments)? If this is being expressed, then the Spirit may be calling us to prioritize their experience of mystagogy, which the Catechism describes as a “liturgical catechesis that aims to initiate people into the mystery of Christ” (CCC 1075). Mystagogy leads the baptized from the external signs and rituals of the liturgy to experience and integrate the spiritual meaning of the divine life they signify. It is the form of catechesis that explores the spiritual treasures contained in the sacraments by continuously reflecting on their significance and effect in our personal lives.

Although it was not stated in the reports, people do not seem to understand that the paschal mystery defines the journey of the baptized. Is the Spirit calling the Church to prioritize mystagogical catechesis so that people not only understand the sacraments but have a heartfelt experience of the paschal mystery empowering them and transforming them day by day? Pope Benedict XVI said, “The mature fruit of mystagogy is an awareness that one’s life is being progressively transformed by the holy mysteries being celebrated” (Sacramentum Caritatis, 64).

Comments from Region XIII reports indicate that the People of God yearn for an ever-deeper knowledge of and encounter with God, especially in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The initial proclamation of the Kingdom and lifelong mystagogical catechesis of the Sacraments of Initiation are essential elements of a foundation upon which true liturgical formation may occur. It includes not only an understanding of the Liturgy, but more importantly the integration of the grace of the divine mysteries. God has placed in human hearts a “hunger” for his word (cf, Am 8:11), a hunger which will be satisfied only by full union with him. “Eucharistic communion was given so that we might be “sated” with God here on earth, in expectation of our complete fulfillment in heaven” (Mane Nobiscum Domine, n. 19).

3. Faith Formation and Evangelization

Forming Disciples

Throughout Region XIII (arch)diocesan reports, the People of God express a need for deeper understanding of their Catholic faith. Contrasting responses to theological and/or moral issues suggest that while the vast majority of participants have a genuine love for the Church, there is disparity on their understanding of Church teaching and a lack of fruitful participation in the paschal mystery.

Comments in (arch)diocesan reports that support this claim include: “Participants thought [that] with the challenges of today’s contemporary culture and social environment, Catholic faith formation needs [to involve] more than preparation for First Communion and Confirmation”; “There is a lack of proper formation to carry out the various ministries that are being entrusted to the laity. Many Catholics are unaware of the richness of spiritual pathways, prayer, and contemplation”; “Faith formation is not adequate for youth nor for adults. Most participants felt that there was much more to be done, but this requires a well-educated group of parishioners and catechists...Lay Catholics have been conditioned to be passive recipients rather than active recipients.”

Several Region XIII reports focus on youth and those on the margins leaving the Church, and some reports allude to poor faith formation as the reason for this trend. One diocesan report notes, “The concern, however, arises when parents want to give their children something that they themselves have not received and we are currently faced with at least three generations of non-evangelized Catholics.” Another diocese

notes that “Parents are the primary formators and educators of their children, but many are lost and confused as to how to carry out this role. There is a desire, especially from parents, to receive formation and accompaniment especially through families mentoring families.”

Language in the reports about faith formation or catechesis is typically generic and often does not distinguish between mystagogical initiation, kerygmatic catechesis, biblical studies, moral teaching, doctrinal education, retreats, etc. Also, some people desire catechesis or doctrinal teaching on complex issues. The reports noted a need for fearless discussion and catechesis on sensitive topics. Young people especially desire to be heard and to openly discuss complex issues, such as racism, LGBTQ concerns, sexism, abuse, and the environment, without being “shut down.” One (arch)diocesan report notes, “Evident in the variety of responses about culturally sensitive topics ... a more intelligent and effective catechesis is necessary to better equip Catholics to understand the reasons behind the teaching of the Church.”

However, Catholics may not have the solid foundation of experiencing Christ through kerygmatic formation, which would preclude a doctrinal discussion that requires the mercy, patience, and steadfast love of the Lord. Does the lack of this formation lead to others being “shut down” in these discussions, or to feel that this happens? Does the lack of adult faith formation leave parents feeling ill-equipped to engage such discussions with their children? Do some people insist on the right answers to social issues while not being formed to gaze on others like Christ, speak like him, and manifest his patience?

Furthermore, virtually absent from the reports is a specific expectation of kerygmatic catechesis; yet Catholics who drift from the Church often say that they were not given a personal relationship with Christ, which they found in other Christian communities. Therefore, reflecting further on the distinct types of formation and where the priority should be placed is important.

In Evangelii Gaudium, Pope Francis writes, “In catechesis too, we have rediscovered the fundamental role of the first announcement or kerygma, which needs to be the center of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at Church renewal. The kerygma is trinitarian. The fire of the Spirit is given in the form of tongues and leads us to believe in Jesus Christ who, by his death and resurrection, reveals and communicates to us the Father’s infinite mercy. On the lips of the catechist the first proclamation must ring out over and over: “Jesus Christ loves you; he gave his life to save you; and now he is living at your side every day to enlighten, strengthen and free you.” This first proclamation is called ‘first’ not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more important things. It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the principal proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways, the one which we must announce one way or another throughout the process of catechesis, at every level and moment...” and “We must not think that in catechesis the kerygma gives way to a supposedly more “solid” formation. Nothing is more solid, profound, secure, meaningful and wisdom-filled than that initial proclamation. All Christian formation consists of entering more deeply into the kerygma, which is reflected in and constantly illumines, the work of catechesis...” (nn. 164, 165).

Evangelization

(Arch)diocesan reports throughout Region XIII indicate that the People of God, beginning in their youth, hunger for knowledge of and encounter with Christ. Many participants expressed confusion about the nature of God, Church teaching, and prayer.

Indicative of the need for catechesis was this comment from a consultation leader about 7-8th graders in a Catholic School and their lack of understanding about why they are Catholic: “... they have difficulties with prayer. They do not know if God hears prayers or answers them ... They don’t consider themselves distant from God, but not close either. For many of them prayer only happens at mealtime. Our kids are more or less aware that they are Catholic but are not sure why. A lot of their Catholic life is limited to their parents’

involvement.” Another report stated that, “we no longer live in Christendom, but rather in a new apostolic age. As such, the Lord [is] calling us to equip his Church for apostolic mission.”

While none of the reports stated that Catholics have not integrated the grace of Baptism as beloved children of God the Father, this was expressed by the youth who do not know if God hears their prayers, or that they do not consider themselves close to God. The best means for this aspect of baptismal formation is when parents model prayer and closeness to God, so perhaps the parents have not been well formed so that they might live the grace of Baptism.

*Is the Spirit calling the Church to recapture Baptismal mystagogy? How might we nurture in the People of God the grace implanted at Baptism, when they were anointed as Priest, Prophet, and King, called to go forth and evangelize, to be co-responsible participants in the mission of Christ? As stated in *Christifideles Laici*, n. 14, “A new aspect to the grace and dignity coming from Baptism is here introduced: the lay faithful participate, for their part, in the threefold mission of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King ... Clearly we are the Body of Christ because we are all ‘anointed’ and in him are ‘christs,’ that is, ‘anointed ones,’ as well as Christ himself, ‘The Anointed One.’”*

While the faithful were anointed with the Spirit at Baptism and Confirmation, for many, it seems that the grace lies dormant. They need spiritual formation, kerygmatic catechesis, and biblical formation, as well as doctrinal teaching, so that they might be effective witnesses. As Pope St. Paul VI said, “Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses” (Evangelii Nuntiandi, n.14).

Equipping disciples for mission is the goal of evangelization, catechesis, and faith formation. The rich deposit of faith handed on by Christ, the Church Fathers, Tradition, and the Magisterium yields a bountiful harvest when it is conveyed with mercy and love, and to extend Christ’s healing. “The whole Church is apostolic... All members of the Church share in this mission, through various ways... Indeed, we call an apostolate ‘every activity of the Mystical Body’ that aims ‘to spread the Kingdom of Christ all over the earth’” (CCC, n. 863).

Region XIII (arch)diocesan reports also indicate a desire for community and solidarity. One diocese notes, “While it is important to attend Sunday Mass, this no longer suffices to anchor someone in their Christian faith. A wholistic [sic.] Christian way of life, that includes a meaningful community dimension, is essential.”

Of special note in various reports was the recurring theme of evangelization and catechesis of the Hispanic community. In one (arch)diocese, Hispanics comprise 40 percent of the population but only 8 percent responded to the survey. Thirty-eight Hispanic individuals from that same (arch)diocese attended a listening session conducted in Spanish. The report noted that “...the survey significantly under-represents the diocese’s Hispanic population” and pointed to a need for youth programming and retreats in Spanish. In terms of qualifying Spanish-speakers to serve as catechists, “[m]any do not have documents that enable them to receive a background check. Another report notes, “Hispanic leaders stressed their desire for a unified, solid, doctrinal approach to catechesis, particularly for youth.”

Finally, the need for joyful catechists cannot be overemphasized. Comments that support this claim include “The strict rules and lack of joy during sacramental classes make the Catholic Church less appealing and experiential for our youth”; “We need to show our youth and young adults that this faith is not only rich in doctrine but is also a joy-filled community that embraces all of our humanity.”

Conclusion

The *Synod 2021 – 2023 Preparatory Document* reminds us that “It is the Spirit who guides the faithful ‘to all truth’ (Jn 16:13). Through action of the Spirit, ‘this tradition which comes from the Apostles develops in the

Church' so that the People of God may grow 'in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down'" (n. 13). Throughout Region XIII (arch)diocesan reports the Faithful shared similar concerns and patterns of thought; they also shared the same joys, obstacles and hopes.

Among shared joys is knowing that common themes arose among all the parishes, showing that the Holy Spirit is speaking in the communal prayer of the people; feeling a sense of gratitude to be able to speak out and listen to one another; knowing that Protestant, Orthodox, Muslim, Jewish, Latter Day Saints of Jesus Christ and Hindu brothers and sisters desire to participate in common prayer and address community social needs; recognizing that many people want to continue the synod process by gathering and listening to one another and the Holy Spirit; realizing that the People of God yearn to celebrate the Eucharist well; having the opportunity to come to know each other by name and eliminate anonymity among the Faithful, not only in the diocese, but within and among parishes.

Obstacles to living in the Light of the Gospel identified throughout Region XIII (arch)diocesan reports include: "Catholics today are unaware of the richness of these spiritual pathways and methods of prayer and contemplation"; "The priests and catechists do not have the background to explain certain biblical stories in the context of our scientific world"; "[We] need [a] well-educated group of parishioners and catechists"; "Catholic clergy seem rigid and apart from the people"; "People perceive their parishes as a place holding only Masses and Confessions with no other activity taking place"; "We identify with a political party first, rather than as a Christian"; "Understanding that we live in a time where the culture and society in which we find ourselves no longer sees the world in the light of the Gospel. The culture no longer shares nor holds the same beliefs, ethical, or moral foundations that we do, and has become not simply adversarial but, rather, blatantly hostile to the Catholic worldview and way of life." Albeit the Church continues to struggle to be aligned with society at large in many places.

The People of God in Region XIII shared their hopes for the future of the Church with these words: "[The] Synodal process will truly bring about changes"; "Parishioners need to step forward"; "Parents need to be involved in the faith education of their children"; "Laity needs more encouragement and opportunities to serve a variety of administrative and ministerial roles in their parishes"; "[The] Catholic community needs to take advantage of the rich spiritual history from the early Church fathers and mothers through all the great spiritual writers and devotions"; "[Opportunities for] healing of communities of different races, cultures, ethnicities, and nationalities that have been wounded by the church"; "[Working] actively towards unity between Catholics of different languages, cultural backgrounds, liturgical expressions, political affiliations."

The Synod *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission* has two primary aims. The first aim is to remind the Church that synodality is its very nature, at the heart of its identity and history. The second aim is to seek a synodal conversion of the Church, i.e., to put into practice its synodal nature. (Vademecum 1.3) The practices of intentionally listening to the Holy Spirit, and respectfully listening to each other, have been enriching and challenging, and we thank all those who have participated in this phase of the synodal journey.

We invite all the faithful to read this seminal document, reflecting prayerfully, as each (arch)diocese discerns the next steps to address the key areas that have been surfaced. Bishops and their synodal teams are invited to pray before the Blessed Sacrament taking to the Lord the following questions: In light of this report: Do you validate the reflections or questions proposed for further discernment, as indicated by the text in italics? What more is the Holy Spirit saying that the Lord desires in the mission of our local Churches at this time? How do we continue to live and engage in synodality as companions on the journey?



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