



## Regional meetings, 15, 16 and 17 October 2024

### 1. Choosing the world, and not giving in to the tendencies of a "self-referential Church" (Pope Francis' expression)

"God so loved the world that he gave it his own Son." (JN 3:16) The excerpt from the Gospel proclaimed and prayed among us today begins as follows. Yes, God loved the world so much.

The Church is in this world, our world, and she is a part of this world. God did not only love the Church, the people of the baptized that we are, but also and above all the whole world, with all that it contains, even what is not counted in the Church. This little sentence contains the essence of a fundamental ecclesiology, a way of understanding the Church. Let's take some time to reflect on it a little bit more.

"God so loved the world that he gave it his own Son." This Son, Jesus Christ, who is risen: Christ who is seated at the right hand of the Father, we profess it in the Creed. And to use the words of Saint Paul, this risen Christ at the right hand of the Father has a body of which we are members: "we are one body in Christ, all members, each in his own way" (Rom 12:5). We are together members of this body whose head is in heaven, the risen Christ.

Let us therefore take up this sentence from the Gospel excerpt: God so loved the world – including the Church – that he gave it his own Son – this risen Messiah who sits at his right hand, but of whom we are members of his body. In other words, God so loved the world that he gifted it with the Church, the body of his Son, Christ.

This is a call for decentralization. Too often as a Church, and especially we who are invested in our Christian communities as the most faithful among faithful, too often our pastoral work is aimed first and foremost at the survival of our communities. Without daring to admit it, we often wish that our celebrations would be filled again with the baptized like in the past, at the risk of becoming "customs officers" in our pastoral work. To use another expression of Pope Francis: we may thus be tempted to impose obligations on the faithful in order for them to be ready to celebrate a sacrament. There is a balance to be struck between, on the one hand, ensuring the dignity and necessary formation of the faithful before celebrating a Church event, and on the other hand, offering an initiatory preparation that aims – in particular – at increasing attendance at Church gatherings. There is a difference between imposing an obligation and cultivating thirst; I will come back to this later.

The call to decentralization is a clear teaching of the Gospel of Jesus: God so loved the world that he gifted the Church; God has given – a free gift – the Church to the world. And the mission of the Church is to be a sign in the world of the presence of Christ who welcomes, transforms, and kneads the world so that the

leaven of the Gospel may transform it into the reality of the kingdom of God. The real challenge is to give the baptized the desire and willingness to gather together to bear witness to their faith in Christ and to commit themselves to following him in the practice of charity. It is to cultivate their thirst for love.

The saints who have become famous are all figures who have transformed their world, giving themselves not so much to the Church, but rather to the world in general, including the Church, and sometimes even against the tide of the Church itself. Let us think of Saint Francis of Assisi, whom we have just celebrated the Feast in the liturgical calendar.

The Church has always grown thanks to her participation in the life of the world: the call of the poorest, the destitute and the sick, the trials experienced by conflicts and bereavements, the joys experienced by births and the plans of new families, not to mention his wonderful tools to emphasize those sacred moments that are the sacraments of Christian life.

To nourish thirst, we must cultivate unity among ourselves.

## **2. Projects between parish communities to cultivate thirst**

It is not because our situation as a Church in the world is more difficult that communion among us is more difficult. It is because communion among us is difficult, that the difficulties in our daily life as the Church seem to us to be greater and greater. This is true, it seems to me, at all levels.

In the parish community as well as at the diocesan level, choices are difficult to make, such as the future of a building, the type of pastoral care, the reception of the occasional faithful and catechetical needs, the service of the needy, participation in a common life between parishes, - these choices are all the more difficult if communion is lacking. For example, in the universal Church, some openly criticize the fundamental options of the Synod. And yet it is indeed a means of unity.

It is because our communion is tried and difficult that our problems are greater. And not the other way around. Communion above all: Saint Paul himself has several pages on this very human tendency of the *individa clericalis* - not reserved for clerics by the way: "When one declares: 'I belong to Paul', the other: 'I belong to Apollos', are you not acting in a completely human way?" (1 Cor 3:4). We are called to unity above all among all of us, as we are the members of the one and only body of Christ. We are called to unity between parish communities, which asks each one of us to object to the '*esprit de clocher*' – as we say in a French expression – and welcome the other in a humble spirit. Let us think of the method of the conversation in the Spirit: the first principle is to listen to the other in humility.

## **3. In conclusion**

In the sharing of the projects we have just heard, there is reason to rejoice; It is not so much a question of the originality or the exceptional nature of these projects. But first of all, there are many elements with which we decenter ourselves from a self-referential Church; We want to live projects that are linked to the world. There are also in these projects the promising seeds of unity between neighboring parish communities. Participating in these projects and investing in their organization means showing a lot of humility with each other. It is to put oneself at the school of the Holy Spirit.

I give thanks to the Lord, who so loved the world that he gave it his own Son.

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