

As synod winds down, members urged to sow patience



As members of the assembly of the Synod of Bishops return home, share the results of their work and prepare for the final synod assembly in 2024, they must be on guard against people who will want to make them take sides as if the synod were a political debate, said Dominican Fr Timothy Raddcliffe, who addressed the assembly on 23 October alongside Australian theologian Fr Ormond Rush and Benedictine Mother Maria Ignazia Angelini.

‘The global culture of our time is often polarised, aggressive and dismissive of other people’s views,’ Fr Raddcliffe, spiritual adviser to the synod, told members. ‘When we go home, people will ask, “Did you fight for our side? Did you oppose those unenlightened other people?”’

‘We shall need to be profoundly prayerful to resist the temptation to succumb to this party-political way of

thinking,’ he said. ‘That would be to fall back into the sterile, barren language of much of our society. It is not the synodal way,’ which is ‘organic and ecological rather than competitive.’

Having discussed synodality, communion, mission and participation over the previous three weeks, members of the synodal assembly began the final segment of their work with talks from Fr Raddcliffe, Mother Angelini—the other spiritual guide for the synod—and Fr Rush.

They were to [work on a ‘Letter to the People of God’](#) at the synod’s morning session on 23 October.

After a day off to give time to the committee writing the synthesis of the assembly’s discussions, participants were to meet again on 25 October to examine, discuss and amend the synthesis and to propose ‘methods and steps’ for continuing the synodal process in preparation for its next assembly in October 2024.

‘We have listened to hundreds of thousands of words during the last three weeks,’ Fr Raddcliffe said. ‘Most of these have been positive words, words of hope and aspiration. These are the seeds that are sown in the soil of the Church. They will be at work in our lives, in our imagination and our subconscious, during these months. When the moment is right, they will bear fruit.’

Fr Rush told participants that as he listened to discussions over the previous three weeks, ‘I have had the impression that some of you are struggling with the notion of tradition, in the light of your love of truth.’

During the Second Vatican Council, when different approaches to the question of tradition were hotly debated, then-Fr Joseph Ratzinger—later Pope Benedict XVI—explained the two approaches as being ‘a “static” understanding of tradition and a “dynamic” understanding,’ Fr Rush said.

The static version is ‘is legalistic, propositional and ahistorical—relevant for all times and places,’ he said, while ‘the latter is personalist, sacramental and rooted in history, and therefore to be interpreted with an historical consciousness.’

Fr Ratzinger wrote that ‘not everything that exists in the Church must for that reason be also a legitimate tradition,’ but that a practice must be judged by whether it is ‘a true celebration and keeping present of the mystery of Christ,’ Fr Rush said.

The Second Vatican Council ‘urged the church to be ever attentive to the movements of the revealing and saving God present and active in the flow of history, by attending to “the signs of the times” in the light of the living Gospel,’ he said.

As synod members continue their discernment, he said, they are urged ‘to determine what God is urging us to see—with the eyes of Jesus—in new times,’ while also being ‘attentive to the traps—where we could be being drawn into ways of thinking that are not “of God”.’

‘These traps,’ Fr Rush said, ‘could lie in being anchored exclusively in the past, or exclusively in the present, or not being open to the future fullness of divine truth to which the Spirit of Truth is leading the Church.’

To open the assembly’s final section of work, Fr Raddcliffe and Mother Angelini chose the parable of the sower and the parable of the mustard seed from the fourth chapter of the Gospel of Mark.

And Mother Angelini encouraged synod members to ‘narrate the parable’ rather than ‘issue proclamations’ as they continue working over the next year.

‘Today—in a culture of striving for supremacy, profit and followers, or evasion—the patient sowing of this synod is, in itself, like a profoundly subversive and revolutionary act. In the logic of the smallest of seeds sinking into the ground,’ she said. ‘Thus, the synod seems to me to find itself called to dare a synthesis-as-sowing, to open up a path toward reform—new form—which life requires.’

The synodal process, Fr Raddcliffe told members, ‘is more like planting a tree than winning a battle.’

And the only way to ensure they continue the sowing rather than join the fighting is to ‘keep our minds and hearts open to the people whom we have met here’ and treasure the hopes and fears they shared.

‘Humanity’s first vocation in paradise was to be gardeners,’ he said.

Adam tended creation, sharing in speaking God’s creative words, naming the animals. In these 11 months, will we speak fertile, hope-filled words, or words that are destructive and cynical? Will our words nurture the crop or be poisonous? Shall we be gardeners of the future or trapped in old sterile conflicts? We each choose.

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<https://melbournecatholic.org/news/as-synod-winds-down-members-urged-to-sow-patience>