

# The prophetic promises of the Council

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We live in shocking times. Where did the dreams of peace that we nurtured for decades in Europe go, all while we ignored what was happening in other parts of the world? And where is the hope for a just and fraternal world that, in the aftermath of the Second World War, gave rise to the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and more? It seems that in today's world very different dynamics prevail which are as real as they are absurd. Why do we not have a sense of proportion, a sense of the other, of their rights and needs?

I recently found myself in Subiaco, in the cave at the foot of an imposing rock wall where St Benedict's spiritual adventure began during a time of great social confusion. He became the starting point for developments which have led him to become recognized today as one of the patrons of Europe. A lamp burns in that cave which seems to recall a time when Europe was united. It was there, unlike the other occasions I have visited there, that I was assailed by a thought that left me dismayed and which was then spontaneously translated into prayer: "2000 years have passed since your coming, Jesus, since you gave us the Golden Rule and your commandment of love and when you gave your life for all without exclusion; and continue to give it to us today every day in the Eucharist. But today's world seems to present itself *as if you had never come!*"

It is at a time like this that you understand the meaning of mission and become aware of the responsibility of having encountered Jesus and his Gospel. You feel that you have to choose him once again, without reservation, and bet everything on him. But then, perhaps, a doubt creeps into your mind: what can I do? What can I achieve as an individual and also as a single priest? How much can all the priests and consecrated people together achieve something in this globalized world? And then you understand that the synodal path underway in the Catholic Church for three years now is not simply a reorganization of the Church and even less a fad, but an eminently missionary enterprise: all of us, all the baptized, without exception, are called *together*, not to live serenely so that we can accomplish our individual salvation, nor is it to even make the Church or our communities more alive and beautiful, but to ensure above all that the words of Jesus and the lifestyle that he brought reach everyone in order to transform the journey of humanity. This undertaking must also involve Christians of other Churches and ultimately all men and

women: because the mission of safeguarding, cultivating and developing the world according to God's plan concerns everyone, absolutely everyone.

For this to happen – and this is an important aspect of synodality – it is necessary that relationships be transformed within Christian communities and that the fundamental equality and full participation of all the baptized be effectively established. This is something which the Second Vatican Council spoke of prophetically but which has not yet changed the secular paradigms which we unconsciously continue to move with.

We read in *Lumen Gentium*: "...the laity, by their very vocation, seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God. They live in the world, that is, in each and in all of the secular professions and occupations. They live in the ordinary circumstances of family and social life, from which the very web of their existence is woven. They are called there by God that by exercising their proper function and led by the spirit of the Gospel they may work for the sanctification of the world from within as a leaven." [LG 31]

This then will have an immediate impact on ecclesial relations: "And if by the will of Christ some are made teachers, pastors and dispensers of mysteries on behalf of others, yet all share a true equality with regard to the dignity and to the activity common to all the faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ" [LG 32]

The conciliar Decree *Presbyterorum ordinis* on the life and ministry of priests points in the same direction: "For priests are brothers among brothers with all those who have been reborn at the baptismal font. They are all members of one and the same Body of Christ, the building up of which is *required* of everyone." It continues: "Priests, therefore, must take the lead in seeking the things of Jesus Christ, not the things that are their own. They must work together with the lay faithful and conduct themselves in their midst after the example of their Master, who among men 'came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life as redemption for many' (Mt 20:28). Further clarifications follow: "Priests should hold in high honor *that just freedom* which is due to everyone in the earthly city. They must *willingly listen* to the laity, consider their wants in a fraternal spirit, *recognize their experience and competence* in the different areas of human activity, so that together with them they will be able to recognize the signs of the times." Finally, "While trying the spirits to see if they be of God, priests should uncover with a sense of faith, acknowledge with joy and foster with diligence the various humble and exalted charisms of the laity." [9] (*our italics*)

This is the perspective of the present issue of *Ekklesia* through different contributions: tracing the path from the Second Vatican Council to the current synodal process; questioning the specific contribution of lay charisms; focusing on the understanding of the Christian priesthood in the light of the New Testament message and the first centuries of the Church; documenting good practices taking place; and what happens when all the baptized, men and women, lay people, priests and consecrated persons, experience together in carrying out this mission, beginning with the building of the Christian community and broadening out to social and cultural realities.

We are dealing with a great construction site, one in which there is still much to do and which we intend to explore further in future issues with insights and experiences of a synodal and missionary Church.