
A New Pentecost

Brother Ernesto Sanchez, Superior General, recounts his experience in the Synod on Youth

I wish to send my greetings to all the Marists of Champagnat. Here, from the Vatican, where I am participating in the Synod on young people, the faith and vocational discernment since 3 October.

I'm practically one step away from the Paul VI Audience Hall. The synodal hall is on one side. Here, this is a house of some religious who have received me. Apart from the fact that I am very close (to the Paul VI Hall), I have the chance to live with some 25 – 30 (synod) participants, mostly bishops, from various parts of the world.

And well, as you can see, Saint Peter's is also decorated with these seven new saints, two women and five men including Paul VI and Archbishop *Óscar Romero*. The testimony of all of them is a grace for the Church.

Also, during the moments that I walk around here, I can say that, apart from enjoying the beauty of this place, when I go for walks around here at night, I see the poverty. I see many people who sleep here practically out in the open, and it's also nice to see some groups that come to help them, that come to be close them. Just on Tuesday I met a group of (the community of) Sant'Egidio, who comes, is with them, offers them something to eat, something similar to what a group of brothers from the general house does every Tuesday in (Rome's) Tuscolana area.

Well, as you know, most of the participants are bishops. There are also about 30 young people. There are female religious. There are also 10 male religious who participate, including Brother Robert Shiller, Lasallian, and I, of the Marist Institute.

I believe that this coexistence is also a privilege, because I am encountering bishops from all over the world and cardinals who recognise and value the Marist Institute. There are many of them, and of several continents. From now on, I want to stress this with a grateful heart.

And, well, Pope Francis, just at the beginning, invited all of us synod participants *"to the ardor and Gospel passion"* and invited us *"to awaken and renew our ability to dream and hope."*

From the beginning, the Pope also invited us to listen. He said: *"speak boldly and listen with humility."* And I can also say that the Pope, with his gestures, is demonstrating something important; For example, from the first moment we arrived at the synod hall, the Pope personally received and greeted us, individually. What a beautiful gesture and surprise for us!

After greeting him, I was also able to exchange a few words with him for a moment during the second day. As well as introducing myself, we began talking about the statue of Saint Marcellin Champagnat that he looks at practically every day when he leaves (his residency) Santa Marta. Then we spoke of our Congregation, dedicated to youth. Our main mission is among young people. And we also agreed that this synod – and I myself thanked him for it – by focusing on young people, was of great importance, especially for the future and I told him that, as a congregation, we were very much in accordance with this dream of Pope Francis for our times.

I can also say that, the way he is treating us, by being close to us, by being present at the meetings, listening, taking notes, and referring to some of the participations when he intervenes... I think he is showing us a way, a way of being with young people, of being present, of being close, of knowing how to challenge with the right word. And this, to begin with, I consider it a grace, too.

Another topic that I want to mention is regarding the subjects that have already started to be discussed in the Synod. This first part was devoted to seeing the reality: we called it “**Recognize**” and we are already in the second part which would be called “**Interpret**”.

I can already comment on some elements that are coming out. For example, the ones that caught my attention. For example, we do not want to talk about the Church and young people as if they were two separate worlds, but rather we want to talk about young people as an important and essential part of the Church.

We also want to recognize the importance of youth leadership and, for this reason, for them to take a more active part. So, let's talk more about a ministry not for young people but a ministry with young people.

We talked about having a positive look towards young people, although, certainly, we also recognize the extreme situations that are taking place today.

We spoke about the world of migration, and we recognize that a great majority of migrants are young people.

We talked about how to generate a more empathetic Church, that listens more, that dialogues more.

We discussed the realization that, perhaps it happens to many agents that we lack the necessary preparation to be close to the youth, apart from the fact that we also lack, sometimes, the desire to be among them.

Another issue that came up was how to deal with all young people who experience or have experienced some type of abuse.

We have also talked about how to spread the living Jesus with one's own life. Our passion for Jesus and for announcing Him, that we spread automatically through our own experience.

We covered the key role of the family. These are some issues that have been discussed and that I am sharing with you but towards the end of the Synod all this will be published in a document; ideas, that little by little, we will be developing and reflecting on in depth.

I would like to conclude and end this moment with an image. There is an image when entering the lobby of Paul VI Hall, of Pentecost, and it is a very beautiful image. It represents the apostles, Mary, the Holy Spirit that descends, and then you can see a series of popes and bishops who, throughout history, have been in this service and I would like to add that it is very symbolic because what if this Synod is lived as a new Pentecost?

I want to ask you to join us in prayer so that we really live this Synod as a new Pentecost.

A few days ago, when I referred to the synod hall during my speech, I commented and said that *“in our times, we will need to place ourselves humbly more as disciples than as teachers seeking to co-create, hand in hand, with young people the dream of God.”* And I spoke of *“how to promote a renewed vocational culture in our times.”*

Today I ask Mary that it be she who, from her heart, so full of God, enlightens us in this mission; enlightens us to be that beacon of hope that the General Chapter invited us to be; all of us, Marists of Champagnat. Thank you.

Br Ernesto Sánchez
