

Synodality Faces 3 “Risks”



At a live-streamed address for the opening of the synodal path at the Vatican’s New Synod Hall on Oct. 9, Pope Francis has asked all Catholics to be conscious of three risks that could impede the synodal process: “formalism,” “intellectualism,” and “the temptation of complacency.”

Addressing the first risk, he said: “If we want to speak of a synodal Church, we cannot remain satisfied with appearances alone; we need content, means, and structures that can facilitate dialogue and interaction within the People of God, especially between priests and laity.”

“This requires changing certain overly vertical, distorted and partial visions of the Church, the priestly ministry, the role of the laity, ecclesial responsibilities, roles of governance and so forth.”

Turning to the second risk, he cautioned that the synod “could turn into a kind of study group,” losing itself in abstraction. We cannot let it consist of “the usual people saying the usual things, without great depth or spiritual insight, and ending up along familiar and unfruitful ideological and partisan divides, far removed from the reality of the holy People of God and the concrete life of communities around the world.”

The final risk, he said, was to adopt an attitude that “We have always done it this way. Those who think this way, perhaps without even realizing it, make the mistake of not taking seriously the times in which we are living,” he commented. “The danger, in the end, is to

apply old solutions to new problems." Alluding to Matthew 9:16, Pope Francis said, "A patch of rough cloth that ends up creating a worse tear."

"It is important that the synodal process be exactly this: a process of becoming, a process that involves the local Churches, in different phases and from the bottom up, in an exciting and engaging effort that can forge a style of communion and participation directed to mission."

In his address, the pope acknowledged the challenge of involving everyone in the process. But he said: "Without real participation by the People of God, talk about communion risks remaining a devout wish. Enabling everyone to participate is an essential ecclesial duty!"

Pope Francis ended his address with a prayer to the Holy Spirit:

"Come, Holy Spirit! You inspire new tongues and place words of life on our lips: keep us from becoming a 'museum Church,' beautiful but mute, with much past and little future. Come among us, so that in this synodal experience we will not lose our enthusiasm, dilute the power of prophecy, or descend into useless and unproductive discussions. Come, Spirit of love, open our hearts to hear your voice! Come, Spirit of holiness, renew the holy faithful People of God! Come, Creator Spirit, renew the face of the earth!"

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