

10th General Congregation. Overview presented by Vatican News



#SinodoAmazonico

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During the 10th General Congregation which took place on the afternoon of 14 October, the participants in the Special Amazon Synod continued their work. In addition to Pope Francis, there were 177 Synod Fathers present, as well as other auditors, experts and invited guests.

Rethinking ministry in the Church in the light of the parameters of synodality so that the Church might be more and more formed by the Word of God was defined as one of the challenges of the Church in the Amazon region. Several interventions given this afternoon in the Synod Hall highlighted this.

The Word of God

The Word of God is an active and merciful presence; it is educative and prophetic, formative and performative. It underpins that challenge of integral ecology and can be a means for social, economic, cultural and political development and a new humanism. New ministers of the Word, including women, are needed to provide new responses to contemporary challenges. The Church must, therefore, invest in the formation of a well-prepared laity who, in a missionary spirit, will know how to proclaim the Gospel in every part of the Amazon. Providing an adequate formation for committed laity, it was noted, is also fundamental for promoting indigenous vocations to the religious life and ordained ministries.

The role of the laity and women

It was also said in the Hall that the gifts of the laity need to be better expressed and appreciated in a ministerial Church. Thanks to the laity, the Church is manifesting itself as a Church moving outward, distancing itself from clericalism. One intervention in particular suggested that the question of the so-called *virii probati* and the discussion regarding ministries open to women should be treated in an Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops since this theme affects the universal Church. Others suggested that women could be included in non-ordained ministries, ministries intended as service, so as to guarantee the dignity and equality of women in the entire Pan-Amazonian territory. Such ministries could be, for example, that of presiding over celebrations of the Word, or leading the activity of a social-charitable nature.

Virii probati

Another intervention counselled that prior to having *virii probati* priests, it would be necessary to think of *virii probati* deacons—that is, that the *virii probati* priests would come from the ranks of permanent deacons. The Permanent Diaconate can, therefore, be an appropriate “laboratory” for the possible future inclusion of married men to the Sacrament of Holy Orders.

Care for minors and vulnerable adults

Regarding the care of minors and vulnerable adults in the Amazon, the terrible scourge of pedophilia and other forms of sexual abuse requires that the Church be ever vigilant and courageous. It was emphasized that the greatest challenge is that of transparency and responsibility so that these crimes can be prevented and combatted.

Sexual exploitation of the young was a recurring theme. One person said that criminal networks rob children of their infancy, making them also victims of the trafficking of organs. One statistic alone suffices to illustrate how dramatic the situation is: in 2018 in Brazil alone, 62 thousand rapes were recorded. This is one of the highest numbers in the Amazon region.

At the bottom of all of this are grave economic inequality and the lack of government intervention capable of combatting such horrendous crimes both at the local and international levels. Thus arose the appeal for an increased commitment in the area of prevention, including the involvement of the Episcopal Conferences and religious congregations.

The fight against human trafficking, which also heavily involves minors and women, was brought to the attention of those in the Synod hall. They were reminded that the victims of this drama are among the most dehumanized in the world. It was proposed that through the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development, large companies be made to comply with international policy regarding human trafficking and that a Special Pastoral Commission be instituted to deal specifically with this crime.

Pastoral work for vocations and youth ministry

From other interventions, there emerged the importance of the pastoral work for vocations which cannot be left out of the work of evangelization. Furthermore, all evangelization must be accompanied by youth ministry which is a call to, and at the same time, a proposal for, a personal encounter with Christ. Those in the Hall were reminded that young people who wish to follow Christ need to be supported by adequate formation through the witness of holy and committed lives. It follows that priests must be capable of understanding completely the specific needs of the Amazon region. Their formation cannot be excessively academic, but must proceed with a missionary spirit and the heart of a shepherd.

Water: a primary resource

Forming catechists toward an integral ecology was underlined again, particularly regarding caring for and safeguarding water, a primary resource and source of life. This theme was also repeated by several auditors and invited guests. One provided the statistic that thousands of children die every day due to water related diseases. Another recalled what Pope Francis has said in the past that the next world war will be connected with water. It is urgent that there be a global awareness of the need to protect our common home, and that we be reconciled with creation. "Later will be too late", those in the hall were told. An "ecological conversion" consists also in looking at the ethical dimension underpinning contemporary life styles which are often too technocratic, whose ultimate objective is that of turning everything into profit to the detriment of the vision of the human being as an integral human person.

The challenge of communication

A theme from the morning's 9th General Congregation was repeated in the afternoon: that of communication. It was affirmed that through the mass media we must be open to communicate to every culture and in every language in order to support the Amazonian peoples. Church-sponsored media should, therefore, be a place to consolidate local knowledge which can be done through the formation of indigenous communicators.

Other reflections made by various Synodal Fathers included defending the indigenous peoples, which could also be carried out through education and through other small projects aimed at social development. Because they are often marginalized from society, indigenous populations should not be viewed as “incapable”, but must be empowered, listened to, understood and welcomed. From this theme, emerged the invitation for greater cooperation between the Justice and Peace Commission and that for promoting human rights.

Pope Francis' reflection

When the Congregation concluded, Pope Francis spoke, reflecting on various themes that had emerged during the afternoon and highlighted a few things that had struck him the most.

Source: Vatican News