

Percival Holt, from Indian Catholic Youth Movement, in the Synod



October 16th

Intervention

Dear Holy Father Pope Francis, Synodal Fathers and my fellow ministers in the mission of Christ.

I lead the Catholic Youth of India as the National President of Indian Catholic Youth Movement under the Bishops Conference of India.

“Youth are like fire. We flame, we bring light, give warmth but are also under the threat of getting extinguished. Today we are flickering, we may either blow off into the darkness or blow up into wildfire to burn down everything. The church needs to kindle these sparks into the right flames”.

In my life, at a point when I was discerning my vocation to priesthood, I had the wise guidance of a Bishop and few priests. In understanding faith beyond being a ritualistic Christian I had my youth director and some sisters who enabled me to fall in love with Christ & his church, and become a leader and inspiration to many. But I also saw many young people who yearned for such consecrated persons in their lives but could not find one. Many of them struggled in life, while others have given up and some lost.

Young people today prefer seeking assistance from others rather than consecrated people. I must not say, but this needs to be addressed - many of our priests today are a poorer inspiration than lay people. Understanding what is going wrong is crucial before priests are reduced to meagre ritual-performers. Seminarians need to be groomed to nurture and handle the challenges & psychology of young people and extract the best out of them just as Jesus did with his disciples.

I belong to a country where, in cities, young people are drawn towards fast money, growing corporate culture and imitation of the western lifestyle, leading to increased addictions and getting into quick relationships both physically and emotionally.

Whereas, in rural areas, still lack of education, poverty, narrow mindedness, oppression, anti-social practices are quite prevalent.

We are growing in an environment where high population dictates the norms of life and success, consequently extreme competition in education and career is making many disappointed, depressed, mentally disturbed and also migrate in huge numbers. Political chaos, corruption & communal disharmony is on the rise.

Young people are stretched between design and desire, i.e. between what has been passed on and what we believe in. The church has been shying away from giving us authentic expressions and clarifications. Today, there is a plethora of information and awareness to dilute traditional teachings and lifestyle. We need to have more open spaces for community building and missionary experiences.

Young people have creative ideas and are innovative. Giving them the opportunities to contribute, explore and gain expertise is important, just as Jesus sent out his disciples to perform their apostolic ministry, who returned overwhelmed with what they had achieved. And I saw this true when 2 parish priests in my diocese entrusted full responsibility of the church construction to the youth group, who not only supervised the work day & night but also creatively helped raise huge funds and in cost cutting.

I have 2 concrete proposals;

1. The Holy See should ask every country to hold a similar synod of all Bishops at the local level, in order to discuss and pass on the deliberations & outcome of this synod to every Bishop and draw a National pastoral plan for “youth ministry” in every country.
2. We need to create more organized forums for young people in parishes & institutions, catering to holistic formation, providing opportunities for spiritual, social, educational, skills & professional growth, under the leadership of young people itself & mentorship of a Chaplin, in every diocese, under the aegis of the bishops’ conference, that will create a network of young disciples and leaders in the country.

I conclude by saying “we young people are like Matthew and Paul, shrewd and frustrated but hollow within, we seek a true shepherd who won’t distance us. We are like Mary Magdalene & the Samaritan woman and like them we too are physically, sexually & emotionally disturbed and have broken relationships. We are seeking living water from you. We are like Peter - timid, coward and selfish, but have the potential to be foundation stones.

We are like Zacchaeus, waiting to see the messiah. Like him we are corrupt in our day to day dealings and live dubious lives. We cheat, hurt & hide from everyone and many times we cheat our own self. We are hiding behind tattoos, piercings, fake smiles and beautiful pictures over social media but we are lonely, lost and sad within. We search Christ in the church”.

Thank You!

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Indian Catholic Youth Movement

National Youth Commission

Conference of Catholic Bishops of India (CCBI)