

## LISTENING BY WAY OF THE INTERNET



The big event is drawing nearer. The XV General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, scheduled for October 2018, will focus on contemporary youth.

The Church wants to listen to the new generations. The Synod will be *about* young people, but when Pope Francis announced the event, he revealed that his intention was to make it primarily *their* event. He wrote that he wanted them to be the center of attention because “I carry you in my heart.”

For this reason, the Church wants to involve young people in the event as protagonists, above all by gathering them together from 9-24 March 2018, so as to meet them and give them the chance to express their expectations and desires, their uncertainties and concerns regarding the complex situations in today’s world. This moment will enrich the “consultation stage,” already launched through the publication of the Synod’s Preparatory Document and its related questionnaire. It is a year, therefore, of listening to the voice, faith, doubts and criticisms of young people—*all* of them, even those farthest from the Church, because hopes and dreams for the future leave no one out. The Church is looking for a “space” in which to enter into harmony with youth, tune in to their wave lengths

and connect with them in their preferred spaces, meeting them through their posted messages and “selfies.” The Synod intends to be interactive in its strategies and in its channels to inform, share, plan, listen to young people and celebrate this event with them. Months ago, the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops launched an online channel in several languages ([youth.synod2018.va](http://youth.synod2018.va)) so as to encourage a wider participation of all the youth throughout the world in this event, not only by providing them with information about it but also by giving them the chance to interact and participate in the preparations for it.

During this year, the whole Church is invited to open up, think in new ways and walk together with young people, coming face-to-face with their doubts, criticisms and hopes about a Church that sometimes seems too far removed from the uncertain and fluid world in which they live their relationships, build their identities and plan their lives.

I think it would be a good idea to let ourselves be provoked by some of things Pope Francis had to say during his meeting with the Bishops of Brazil in the Archbishop’s house in Rio de Janeiro, 27 July 2013, on the occasion of World Youth Day:

“We have to face the difficult mystery of those people who leave the Church, who, under the illusion of alternative ideas, now think that the Church—their ‘Jerusalem’—can no longer offer them anything meaningful and important. So they set off on the road alone, with their disappointment [like the disciples on the way to Emmaus]. Perhaps the Church appears too weak, perhaps too distant from their needs, perhaps too poor to



respond to their concerns, perhaps too cold, perhaps too caught up with itself, perhaps a prisoner of its own rigid formulas. Perhaps the world seems to have made the Church a relic of the past, unfit for new questions; perhaps the Church could speak to people in their infancy but not to those who have 'come of age' and are now adults. It is a fact that nowadays there are many people like the two disciples of Emmaus; not only those looking for answers in the new religious groups that are sprouting up, but also those who already seem to have eliminated God from their lives, both in theory and in practice.

"Faced with this situation, what are we to do?"

"We need a Church that is not afraid to go forth into the night of these people. We need a Church capable of meeting them on their way. We need a Church capable of joining their conversations. We need a Church able to dialogue with those disciples who, having left Jerusalem behind, are wandering aimlessly, alone, with their own disappointment, disillusioned by a Christianity now considered barren, fruitless soil, incapable of generating meaning. [...]"

"From this point of view, we need a Church capable of walking alongside people, of doing more than simply listening to them; a Church that accompanies them on their journey; a Church able to make sense of the 'night' contained in the flight of so many of our brothers and sisters from Jerusalem; a Church that realizes that the reasons why people leave also contain reasons why they can eventually return. But we need to know how to courageously interpret the larger picture.

"Jesus warmed the hearts of the disciples of Emmaus. I would like all of us to ask ourselves today: are we still a Church capable of warming hearts? A Church capable of leading people back to Jerusalem? Of bringing them home? Jerusalem is where our roots are: Scripture, catechesis, sacraments, community, friendship with the Lord, Mary and the Apostles.... Are we still able to speak of these roots in a way that will revive a sense of wonder at their beauty?"<sup>1</sup>

The word is an appeal that requires a person to mobilize him/herself and reach out to others:

<sup>1</sup> [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco\\_20130727\\_gmg-episcopato-brasile.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2013/july/documents/papa-francesco_20130727_gmg-episcopato-brasile.html)

Our way of reaching self-fulfillment as individuals requires exchanging words with others. It is a paradox but the need we have to build our personality, our individuality, involves the game of exchanging words. Therefore words are essentially an intermediary between me and myself, between me and the world, between the world and me. This is the purpose of words. In fact, the meaning of any word is to help us get in touch with what is human.<sup>2</sup>

Words and listening are therefore relational: the presence of the other person implies the opening of a space for asking questions. Communication is linked to a bouncing back and forth of questions that make listening not something passive but an attitude of allowing oneself to be "invaded," inconvenienced, by those queries. The questioner is offering the listener the chance to reply; he/she is initiating a dialogue, adopting a stance of openness to the other person on the emotional level.

Today's teenagers have grown up with the Internet. They are always connected; they view and listen to what they please, when they please. They talk about themselves by means of their YouTube videos, the stories and photos they post on Instagram, their posts and links on Facebook, their messages on Snapchat and conversations on Whatsapp. They write and publish their stories and novels on Wattpad. For them, social media are spaces in which to keep updated about what is happening in the world; they are environments in which to talk to others and talk about themselves, places in which to freely express their anger, take on commitments, confront themselves, dialogue, empathize with the stories of others and be there for them.

Paulo Freire says that the word is more than a simple tool that connects people to one another; it is also reflection because "there is no authentic word that is not praxis. Therefore, to speak authentically means to transform the world."

To be continued in the next issue....

Maria Antonia Chinello, fma

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Barcellona Pietro, *La parola perduta. Tra polis greca e cyberspazio*, Dedalus Editions, Bari 2007. Also by the same author: *Elogio del discorso inutile. La parola gratuita*, Dedalus Editions, Bari 2010.

