

READ REFLECT REVIEW

SESSION 8

LETTERS, ENCYCLICALS AND LIVES OF SAINTS SYNODALITY AND FAITH HOPE LOVE

READ

RECENTLY, THE HOLY FATHER REMINDED US THAT "THE PATH OF SYNODALITY ... IS AND MUST BE ECUMENICAL, JUST AS THE ECUMENICAL PATH IS SYNODAL" (AUDIENCE TO HIS HOLINESS MAR AWA III, 19.11.2022).

THIS YEAR THE SYNODAL PROCESS SEES US IN THE **CONTINENTAL STAGE** CONCERNING THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE CHURCHES OF THE SAME REGION. WE ARE ALL CALLED TO CONTINUE THE EXERCISE OF LISTENING AND DISCERNMENT. HOWEVER, BECAUSE OF THE PROMINENCE OF THE THREE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES IN OUR EARLIER SESSIONS, THE FORMATION PROGRAM WILL CONCLUDE WITH USING A REFLECTION ON THE PLACE OF THESE VIRTUES IN THE SYNODAL PROCESS. THIS ALSO PROVIDES A USEFUL LINK BETWEEN THE 2022 PROGRAM AND THAT OF 2023.

THE THREE GREAT THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES OF **FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE** NOURISH AND SUSTAIN THE LIFE OF EVERY CHRISTIAN AND THEY BECOME THE HALLMARK OF THE CHURCH'S PRESENCE AND HER WORK OF REDEEMING AND SANCTIFYING. THE VIRTUES HAVE RELATIONAL AND PRACTICAL CONSEQUENCES, AND A BRIEF CONSIDERATION MIGHT PROVE HELPFUL, NOT ONLY FOR DISCERNMENT SO INTEGRAL TO THE SYNODAL PROCESS BUT IN DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY WHICH IS JOURNEYING TOGETHER IN CHRIST.

FAITH WHEN OUR RELATIONSHIPS EXPRESS OUR FAITH, WE WILL BE COMMITTED TO EACH OTHER ON THE JOURNEY, NO MATTER HOW LONG OR WHAT DIFFICULTIES MAY OCCUR. THIS IS BECAUSE OUR FAITH IS NOT JUST FAITH IN ONE ANOTHER AND IN THE SACRAMENTAL STRUCTURES OF THE CHURCH, BUT IT IS FAITH IN GOD WHO IS PRESENT AND GUIDES EVERYONE WHO IS A MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH.

FAITH ALSO GIVES US THE ABILITY NOT TO GET DIVERTED BY CONFLICTS AND DIVISIONS, BUT TO COME TO UNDERSTAND THEM, AND WHAT LIES BEHIND THEM, SO THAT RATHER THAN A SOURCE OF DESPAIR AND PARALYSIS THEY CAN BECOME A MEANS OF ADVANCING IN GOD'S SERVICE. FAITH IS THE COURAGE TO PERSEVERE, KEEPING OUR MINDS, HEARTS AND WILLS ALWAYS FOCUSED ON AND OPEN TO GOD.

HOPE THIS IS ONE OF THE GREAT GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. IT FILLS US WITH CREATIVITY AND OPENS NEW POSSIBILITIES. HOPE ALWAYS ALLOWS US TO BEGIN AGAIN. IT IS NOT AFRAID OF FAILURE BUT, BECAUSE IT IS ALWAYS OPEN TO THE FUTURE, WHICH IS GOD'S GIFT, IT HAS THE POWER TO LEARN FROM FAILURE AND TO GROW IN UNDERSTANDING.

CHRISTIAN HOPE IS NOT THE SAME AS HUMAN OPTIMISM. CHRISTIAN HOPE DOES NOT ARISE FROM ANY NATURAL DISPOSITION. NOR IS IT THE PRODUCT

OF SOME UTOPIAN VISION BY WHICH THE FUTURE WILL BE BETTER THAN THE PAST. A MAN-MADE HOPE WILL ALWAYS END AS THE FRAGMENTS OF A SHIP-WRECKED DREAM WASHED UP ON THE SHORES OF AN UNREDEEMED HISTORY.

THE VIRTUE OF HOPE GIVES US THE COURAGE TO FACE REALITY AND ITS TRUTH WITHOUT DESPAIR AND, NO MATTER HOW DEEP THE VALLEY OF DARKNESS, TO FIND THAT CHRIST IS ALREADY PRESENT AND THAT HIS GRACE IS ALREADY WORKING SOMETHING NEW. OUR GRACE IS TO WORK WITH HIM IN HOPE.

LOVE: LOVE, AS ST PAUL REMINDS US, IS THE GREATEST OF ALL THE SPIRIT'S GIFTS BECAUSE GOD IS LOVE (1 COR.13). WHEN WE ARE LOVED, WE EXPERIENCE CONSOLATION AND, WHEN WE LOVE, WE ARE MINISTERS OF CHRIST, THE CONSOLER. THIS LOVE HAS THE POWER TO OVERCOME ALL HATRED BECAUSE IT REFUSES TO BE DRAWN INTO THE ECONOMY OF ENMITY AND THE POWER STRUGGLES OF DOMINANCE AND SUBJECTION. LOVE SEEKS ONLY THE GOOD OF THE OTHER AND IT REFUSES TO ACCEPT ANYTHING LESS. THIS GIVES TO SUCH LOVE A STRONG, GENEROUS HUMILITY AND A FIERCE COMMITMENT TO THE TRUTH.

IF WE TAKE THESE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES AS OUR STARTING POINT, THEY CAN ALSO HELP US WITH THE PROCESS OF DISCERNING THE PATH OF THE HOLY SPIRIT THAT BRINGS LIFE TO THE COMMUNITY AND ITS WORK. WE CAN BEGIN TO SEE HOW THEY WILL ALSO BE ACTIVE IN THE SYNODAL PROCESS. AN APPLICATION OF THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES AS PART OF THE WAY IN WHICH WE DISCERN AS WELL AS ACT, CAN SERVE TO GUIDE US IN OUR THINKING AND IN OUR RELATIONS.

THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES OF FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE CONDITION ALL OUR RELATIONSHIPS – WHETHER IN THE PARISH OR THE SYNOD – AND THEY ARE THE ROAD ON WHICH WE MEET THE WORLD IN ITS DOUBTS, OPPOSITIONS, INDIFFERENCE, AND SUFFERING. THEY ARE NOT ONLY THE CONVERGENT PATHS OF SYNODALITY, BUT THEY ARE ALSO THE CONVERGENT PATHS OF CHRISTIAN LIFE AND MISSION; THEY ARE THE SPIRIT-GIVEN GRACED WAYS OF OUR CONVERSION TOGETHER INTO THE FULLNESS OF LIFE IN CHRIST.

REFLECT

CAN I SEE THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SYNODALITY AND THE GREAT VIRTUES OF FAITH, HOPE AND LOVE?

REVIEW

GENERAL DISCUSSION : WHAT HAVE I LEARNED FROM THE CONNECTION BETWEEN SYNODALITY AND THE ENCYCLICALS, BOTH FEATURING THE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES.

REFERENCE: 2021 JAMES HANVEY SJ <://DIMENSIONS.FAITH/THE-JOURNEY-OF-SYNODALITY>