

Path to unity

Message from CEC President Rev. Christian Krieger
Continental Assembly of the Synod in Europe
Prague, Czech Republic, 5 to 12 February 2023

First of all, I would like to express our gratitude for the invitation to participate in this continental synod. By inviting two representatives of the Conference of European Churches, 113 Anglican, Orthodox and European Protestant Churches from 42 European countries are benefiting from your work, your reflections, your listening, and the spirit that is blowing through this synodal process, for which I give thanks.

The synod is about to become a moment of great importance, a turning point, which will mark the history of the Church, that of the Catholic Church of course, but also more widely those of the Church of Jesus Christ.

CEC is very sensitive to the way the Pope has sought to involve the other Churches in the synodal process, sensitive to the attention he has given to the ecumenical dimension of the synodal process by affirming that ecumenism is a necessity for the synodal process just as synodality is for ecumenism. "the path of synodality... is and must be ecumenical, just as the ecumenical path is synodal".

I was struck by how the issues of tension raised yesterday (those about abuse, the place of women in the Church, the reception of people with disabilities, etc.) caused less mention of what is at the heart of the Church's vocation: evangelisation, mission, unity, social service, so that law may spring forth like a fountain, and justice may flow like an inexhaustible stream. The weight of internal discussions is not neutral. I asked myself whether the synod should not work on the question of catholicity, of universal communion. It seems to me necessary to prevent the tensions that are so useful to the tent from reaching a breaking point.

In order to make room for the path to unity, communion and catholicity, I suggest that you listen to the letter to the Ephesians.

Reading

In the opening of his letter to the Ephesians, the Apostle Paul recalls two moments in the unity of the Church, two times that are useful for progressing on the road to the unity of the body of Christ.

First, Paul recalls the work of God in Christ for the world, for the salvation of human beings. And this is the object for the apostle of thanksgiving. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ". In this word of thanksgiving and gratitude, the apostle scribes his reading of the work of Christ. "In him he chose us before the foundation of the world... "In him we have redemption

through his blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of his grace... "In him we have also received our share of the inheritance... In so doing, Paul directs our gaze to Christ, the foundation of our faith and hope, the foundation also of the unity of the Church, his body, which welcomes his disciples in their great diversity. Looking to Christ, the diversity of his disciples cannot be so great, so wide or so broad, as to undermine the unity that is given to us in him. Indeed, in the apostle's recollection of God's work in Christ, Paul speaks of the grace that is given to the human being, the undeserved gift that God gives by accepting as righteous the one who by his condition cannot claim it. Protestants, Catholics, Methodists, Anglicans, we share this reading of the Gospel and have expressed it in the Joint Declaration on Justification by Faith signed in Augsburg. The apostle is convinced that by looking again and again to Christ, by remembering what is given to us in him, by receiving the fruit of his reconciling work, we progress on the way to the unity of his body. Thus, this passage encourages us, rather than tirelessly scrutinising our differences and asserting our specificities, our points of view, to turn our gaze towards Christ, thus discovering the unity that precedes us and that is given to us in him.

Secondly, the apostle Paul recognises this work of Christ welcomed by the community of Ephesus. He discerns in Ephesus the fruits of the reconciliation offered in Christ. "In him you also, having heard the word of truth, the good news of your salvation, have come to faith and have been sealed with the promised Holy Spirit... In doing so, the apostle enters in a certain way into the logic developed more recently around the concept of receptive ecumenism, the object of which is to recognise in the other the authenticity of the faith process and to see what it could teach me to enrich my own understanding of the faith and my own way of living the hope that is given to us in sharing. This logic is not without analogy with the process of prayerful listening at the heart of the synodal process. Always, because the apostle recognises in the Church of Ephesus a part of the body of Christ, he gives thanks for this Church. He carries it in his prayer, so that it may grow in its knowledge of God, and grasp ever more fully the hope that is attached to its call.

The two-step approach of the Apostle Paul, on the one hand to remember the work of God given in Christ for the world, and on the other hand to recognise the fruits of Christ's presence in a given community, is a cornerstone of any journey towards unity.

Over the past few days, I have heard many reflections, observations and questions that are posed *mutatis mutandis* in many of the churches of the Conference of European Churches. So far we have listened to each other. Recognising the authenticity of the body of Christ beyond the otherness of the other, even where the tensions mentioned explicitly yesterday give rise to fears of rupture, clears the way for unity, guides us towards it, consolidates it. May God bless our listening to this recognition.

Amen.