

Extraordinary Synod

In this four-page pull-out section, we take a look at the last days of the extraordinary Synod of Bishops, which concluded in Rome on Sunday, December 8.

Bishops issue pastoral statement from extraordinary synod

Vatican City (NC) — Here is the Vatican translation of the Latin-language pastoral message issued Dec. 7 by the extraordinary Synod of Bishops. The document is titled "Message to the People of God."

I. We bishops, having come together from five continents and assembled in Rome for the synod with the pope, have lived with intensity a privileged moment of communion in prayer, dialogue and study. You know, dear brothers and sisters, that the Holy Father invited us during these days to recall with him the Second Vatican Council, to evaluate its implementation, to promote it in the church in such a way that it might be fully lived.

All of us, bishops of the Eastern rites and the Latin rite, have shared unanimously in a spirit of thanksgiving, the conviction that the Second Vatican Council is a gift of God to the church and to the world. In full adherence to the council, we see in it a wellspring offered by the Holy Spirit to the church, for the present and the future. We do not fix upon the errors, confusions and defects which, because of sin and human weakness, have been the occasion of suffering in the midst of the people of God. We firmly believe and we see that the church finds today in the council the light and strength that Christ has promised to give to his followers in each period of history.

II. The message of Vatican II proposes to us for our time "the inexhaustible riches of the mystery of Christ." Through the church which is his body, Christ is ever present in the midst of humanity. We are all called, through faith and the sacraments, to live fully communion with God. Inasmuch as she is communion with the living God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, the church is, in Christ, the "mystery" of the love of God present in the history of mankind. The council has powerfully recalled this, and we adhere to it in faith.

This is the reality that is lived and participated in by the baptized. They are members of the one body of Christ in which the Holy Spirit abides and acts. The structures and relations within the church must express this communion.

The first chapter of the Constitution on the Church ("Lumen Gentium") does not bear the title "The Mystery of the Church" without good reason. We are speaking here of a reality of which we must be ever more certain. We are aware that the church cannot renew herself without more profoundly



American delegates to the extraordinary world Synod of Bishops talk to reporters during a press conference. The conference was held in the same room used for press conferences during Vatican II. (NC drawing by Franklin McMahon)

rooting this spiritual note of mystery in the hearts of Christians. This note has as its first characteristic element the universal call to holiness addressed to all the faithful as well as to those who, according to their state in life, follow the evangelical counsels. It is thus necessary to understand the profound reality of the church and consequently to avoid false sociological or political interpretations of the nature of the church. In this way we will go forward without ceasing in our work, in faith and hope, for Christian unity. The Lord Jesus Christ, who is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow, assures the life and unity of the church throughout the ages. Through this church God offers an anticipation and a promise of the communion to which he calls all mankind.

III. Animated by this joyful hope for the church and the world, we invite you to know

better and more fully the Second Vatican Council, to intensify its deepened study, to understand better the unity and the richness of all the constitutions, decrees and declarations. It is also a question of putting them more deeply into practice: in communion with Christ present in the church ("Lumen Gentium"), in listening to the word of God ("Dei Verbum"), in the holy liturgy ("Sacrosanctum Concilium"), in the service of mankind, especially of the poor ("Gaudium et Spes"). The message of Vatican II, like that of the councils which have marked the history of the church, cannot bring forth its fruits except through a sustained and persevering effort. This message must be listened to still more, with an open and willing heart. We call on you to join in our effort. We too have committed ourselves to using all the means at our

disposal to help you respond to all the appeals that the council addresses to the church. It is with particular affection that we ask priests to strive with us, for the Lord has called them to serve the people of God with us.

Every baptized man and woman, according to his or her state in life and in the church, receives the mission to proclaim the Good News of salvation for man in Jesus Christ. Each is therefore called to exercise his or her particular responsibility. Likewise, every community is called to deeply study the concrete exigencies of the mystery of the church and of her communion. So true is this that the church first of all receives for herself the love and communion which it is her mission to announce to the world. The courage and discernment required today for the evangelization of the world can draw their light and dynamism from the Second Vatican Council.

Today more than ever the Gospel illuminates the future and the meaning of every human existence. In our day, in which an intense thirst for God manifests itself, especially among the young, a renewed reception of the council can still more deeply gather the church together in her mission to announce the Good News of salvation to the world.

IV. Brothers and sisters, in the church we experience with you in an intense and vital way mankind's present crisis and dramas, upon which we have reflected at length. Why? In the first place, because the Second Vatican Council had done so. The council, in effect, had been convoked in order to promote the renewal of the church with a view to evangelizing a radically changed world. Today we feel impelled toward a deeper understanding of the true significance of Vatican II, in order to respond to the world's new challenges and to those which Christ ever addresses to the world. And this, whether it be a question of challenges of the social, economic or political order, or those related to lack of respect for human life, the suppression of civil and religious liberties, contempt for the rights of families, racial discrimination, economic imbalance, insurmountable debts and the problems of international security, and the race for more powerful and terrible arms. The world's ills

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Pope's homily to synod stresses unity in Jesus Christ

Vatican City (NC) — Here is the Vatican text of Pope John Paul II's homily Dec. 5 at an ecumenical service during the extraordinary Synod of Bishops.

Dear brothers and sisters,

1. There is one center around which the human family can be united -- Jesus Christ. That is the will and plan of God. Jesus said, "And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (Jn 12:32). He died "to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad" (Jn 11:52). His church is "the sacrament or instrument and sign of intimate union with God and of the unity of the whole human race" ("Lumen Gentium," 1). She is truly the beginning of the incorporation of all humanity into Jesus Christ as the one Lord. "In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on Earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Col 1:19-20).

Divisions among Christians are contrary to the plan of God. "There is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tm 2:5), in whom God wishes to reconcile all things to himself. Those who are the bearers of his mission must themselves be reconciled; they must

show forth his unifying love in action; they must live in that communion which is toward the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit, and they must manifest this in a united community which witnesses to the reconciling work of God.

The Second Vatican Council threw new light on this imperative, and the present synod has reaffirmed it. So it was important that in these days, in company with our friends the delegated observers from the other churches and Christian world communions, we should spend some time in prayer for the unity of Christians.

2. The restoration of unity must be above all a restoration of the inner dimension of the Christian life -- a wholehearted personal commitment to Jesus Christ which makes intolerable any separation among those who share that commitment. Any faltering in the movement towards unity since the impetus of the Second Vatican Council is partly due to the fact that we have not attended enough to this interior dimension. We must not take it for granted. The most basic form of work for the unity of Christians is sustained and persevering prayer, which itself calls forth collaboration and dialogue. It is because individuals and communities in the Catholic Church gave themselves to such prayer that the church was able in the Second Vatican Council to assume with special vigor her

ecumenical responsibility. A change of heart, interior conversion, renewal of the church -- which were among the central objectives of the council (cf. "Unitatis Redintegratio," 6-7) -- are essential to the ecumenical movement and its growth.

3. As we gather here this afternoon, let us ask the Lord who ended all enmities by his cross and who broke down all walls of separation to look with compassion on the agonies of our world. By the power of his Holy Spirit, may he make us instruments of his peace and reconciliation. Let us pray that God will touch the Catholic Church with the power of his renewing grace on the occasion of the synod, and that he may equally renew and encourage in the search for unity those churches and Christian world communions represented here by their observers, and all other Christian communities. Let us thank him for what he has done for them as well as for the Catholic Church through the Second Vatican Council. Together we ask that for all of us this synod may be a point of revival of the will for unity, a deepening of our purpose to go ahead, a resolution to continue in theological dialogue, in greater efforts of collaboration and common witness and in unfailing prayer.

May he who has begun this good work in us "bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil 1:6).

Inside this section:

10 The reports of synod delegates emphasize successes of the Second Vatican Council, rather than disappointments.

11 A group of observers at the synod said the Church should promote greater participation for women, but did not ask for priesthood.

12 Synod observers from various denominations praise the meeting's ecumenical spirit and seek greater dialogue among churches.