

Catholic Reflectors notes

So many things might be said this morning, but I have chosen to restrict myself to comments read through the lens of my dual role as an academic and as someone involved centrally in assisting with the Synod process. I'll start with the second of these lenses and come back to the first for a brief final comment.

1. The first thing that has struck me, again, is the power of living synodal processes rather than merely talking about them. The kind of discussion, encounter, worship and silence we have shared is exactly the way that the Synod has produced its fruits, by shaping a slightly different kind of conversation than those we have in grassroots ecumenical activity, or in formal ecumenical dialogues focused on doctrines and practices or even the study of shared texts.

It's difficult to communicate the value of this process in abstract terms alone (as someone said to me yesterday, you find yourself saying, oh you had to be there). The value is in doing or inhabiting the thing you are talking about, in order to talk about it – finding a synodal way of discussing ecumenism and synodality. So together we have lived a taste of what has been a global experience for Catholics over the last two years. I think we have found it has value for creating a different kind of *exchange of gifts*.

- What do we want to learn from this for our wider ecumenical work?
 - And how as Catholics are we able to see that the synodal process we are engaged in is *absolutely essentially ecumenical*, not just in hoped for *outcomes* that impact a *later* ecumenism, but that our way of being synodal now must be *integrally ecumenical now* to reach that goal. We have to *become not just teach* our identity in baptism. As Pat said yesterday, the question is one of desire.
2. I also wanted to say something about the value of this approach - what could be described as combination of Receptive Ecumenism with the conversation in the Spirit method - for advancing *one* of the key goals named in the Catholic Instrumentum Laboris. The worksheet on ecumenical relationships talks about an aspiration towards ***the healing of memory*** as part of walking together. There *are* painful memories in this room, and we have carried them with great grace these two days.

In a separate part of my work I write about the philosopher Hannah Arendt. She knew a lot about painful memory. She writes about the necessary co-relationship of *trust and truth*, that you don't get to the truth without trust, and that a lack of mutual trust blocks our capacity for a journey towards a fuller truth. She is writing primarily about political systems and boy is that true today. But I also think it applies to our ecumenism too. Listening, encounter, conferring – a receptivity to mutual accompaniment, held through a properly spirit-led process – is not just a soft activity but is part of the trust-building that draws us nearer to the Truth, which for us is ultimately a being-in-relation. So, the Synod is inviting us to think again about how trust-seeking and truth-seeking relate, especially in the case of working towards the

healing of painful memories – and even more importantly the making of new ones. The language we have used these days is less mutual learning and more pilgrimage, and I'd suggest mutual accompaniment.

3. The Synod process echoes something we have also talked about the last two days: 1) there are strengths within our traditions which enable particular forms of accompaniment and I would highlight two areas as a Catholic theologian where I think we have significant synodal learning from you all to do: firstly, in thinking about how we understand better the diversity of charisms amongst the People of God, and secondly in imagining new participatory structures for decision-making and taking.

But there is another kind of mutual accompaniment we are called to in the face of our shared mission realities: we all face a crisis in the care for the earth, we face a deathly hostility to the movement of displaced peoples, we face new conflicts in which religion is used as a force for violence, domestically a population who speak of loneliness, isolation and anxiety, a fracturing and polarisation of political cultures, an generational gap in our pews, and in the church a real problem with reaching those on the margins not as mere recipients of Christian care but as full, dignified and prophetic members of our Church bodies. We are all necessarily humble, learning and receptive co-believers in the face of these realities, and they are urgent. This is the ecumenism – the desire for a common witness to a bleeding world - was the single most powerful ecumenical call found in the original local and national synod reports.

So, relevance for research? I am interested in theological academy that can act as an accompanier of Christian life and the life of the world, opening up our sacred texts and common traditions in the light of the most urgent human questions we encounter in a generation. So, all I have for now is an urgent question: how do those of us in the academy accompany, theologically, the Christian communities who dissatisfied with where we are, open to what we do not yet know, and trusting in the abundance that together we receive, desire, really desire, to seek more synodal ways together.