



Key Quotes from the Beginning of the Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment

by Katie Prejean McGrady

Both Pope Francis's homily at the opening Mass of the synod and his address to the attendees at the first plenary session were challenging and optimistic, setting the stage for a synod focused on listening to others, engaging in dialogue, and being unafraid to courageously speak up, while also humbly paying attention to an opposing view.

This openness to dialogue is framed by hope that everyone will listen so as to learn and come to love the dialogue in which they engage.

"Anointed by hope, let us begin a new ecclesial meeting, one that can broaden our horizons, expand our hearts and transform those frames of mind that today paralyze, separate, and alienate us from young people, leaving them exposed to stormy seas, orphans without a faith community that should sustain them, orphans devoid of a sense of direction and meaning in life."

With this spirit of listening comes a spirit of **discernment**, whereby one is able to humbly approach the other, share ideas, and grow together. Humility: recognizing the good of the other and the value of their gifts, talents, and ideas, is at the root of listening well. This is not just a blueprint for the synod, but for ministry, family life, friendship, the workplace, and the home.

"In this spirit we will try to listen to one another, in order to discern together what the Lord is asking of his Church. And this demands that we be really careful against succumbing to a self-preservation and self-centeredness which gives importance to what is secondary yet makes secondary what is important. Love for the Gospel and for the people who have been entrusted to us, challenges us to broaden our horizons and not lose sight of the mission to which we are called. In this way, we shall aim for an even greater good that will benefit all of us. Without this disposition, all of our efforts will be in vain."

With the spirit of listening and discernment, comes **dialogue**—open and honest sharing. In his opening address, Francis highlighted this important work:

“The synod we are living is a moment of sharing. I wish, therefore, at the beginning of the synod assembly, to invite everyone to speak with courage and frankness (parrhesia), namely to integrate freedom, truth, and charity. Only dialogue can help us grow. An honest, transparent critique is constructive and helpful, and does not engage in useless chatter, rumors, conjectures, or prejudices.”

With so much sharing, listening, and dialogue with one another, Francis also encouraged leaving room for prayer, quiet, and listening to the Lord, setting a model for how the work of the synod would go:

“And so, during the work done in plenary assembly and in groups, after five interventions are made, a moment of silence of approximately three minutes will be observed. This is to allow everyone to recognize within their hearts the nuances of what they have heard, and to allow everyone to reflect deeply and seize upon what is most striking. This attention to interiority is the key to accomplishing the work of recognizing, interpreting and choosing.”

This synod, which is focused on sharing the faith with youth and young adults, does not mean those who do not fall into that “age range” should be excluded. On the contrary, Francis highlighted the necessity of both the old and the young having value and needing one another, especially since it is those who are older who will pass on the traditions and history of the faith.

“We must, on the other hand, cure the virus of self-sufficiency and of hasty conclusions reached by many young people. An Egyptian proverb goes: ‘If there is no elderly person in your home, buy one, because you will need him.’ To shun and reject everything handed down across the ages brings only a dangerous disorientation that sadly threatens our humanity; it brings a disillusionment which has invaded the hearts of whole generations.”

Lastly, Pope Francis named the elephant in the room—that synods often end with a long document that few read and even fewer take to heart. But with this synod and its critically important topic, he wants to change that.

“Let us therefore work to ‘spend time with the future,’ to take from this synod not merely a document – that generally is only read by a few and criticized by many – but above all concrete pastoral proposals capable of fulfilling the synod’s purpose. In other words, to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another, and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands, and inspire in young people—all young people, with no one excluded—a vision of the future filled with the joy of the Gospel.”

At every synod gathering, various bishops, auditors, contributors, and experts will offer four-minute “interventions”—a brief speech highlighting a specific area of discussion or concern. A bishop or contributor may only speak once to the general assembly, though they’ll be engaged in discussion and writing in their individual work groups. But these four minutes, used well, can highlight important topics that need to be discussed, debated, and considered. This is a global gathering—bishops and contributors from around the world will be offering varied perspectives highlighting the specific realities youth and young adults face in their countries. The interventions are not recorded for the public, but the text of the speeches can be released by the individual. Most Rev. Charles J. Chaput, archbishop of Philadelphia, gave his intervention on Thursday, October 4, 2018, and the full text has been released by the *Catholic Herald*.

This quote captures well his hope and desire for this synod:

“If we lack the confidence to preach Jesus Christ without hesitation or excuses to every generation, especially to the young, then the Church is just another purveyor of ethical pieties the world doesn’t need.”

Most Rev. Anthony Fisher, archbishop of Sydney, spoke directly to young people in his intervention:

“Never give up on Jesus because of our failures. Never give up on the Church that you can help make more faithful. Never give up on the world that, with Christ and the Church’s help, you can make a better place.”

Most Rev. Frank Caggiano, bishop of Bridgeport, also gave an intervention on Thursday, concluding his four minutes with this:

“Let us work to capture the heart of all believers to encounter a God who does not promise a sterile life but a life that is itself beautiful, rich in meaning, that invites one’s heart to dare to believe that this earthly life is worth living and worth fighting for in light of an eternal life where the restlessness of the heart will find its final rest in the salvation that alone comes from Christ Jesus the Lord.”

With this spirit of openness, listening, humility, and focus on Christ, the Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment has begun.



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