



An Optimistic Opening Mass **The Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment**

by Paul Jarzembowski

I have been to six international World Youth Days. I have witnessed first-hand the quick-paced energy and enthusiasm that young people bring to a city. There is a palpable feeling of hope and creativity that these gatherings imbue in the fabric of metropolitan landscapes like Rio de Janeiro, Denver, and Krakow.

This week I got another glimpse of that energy—this time in Rome on the opening day of the 2018 Synod of Bishops. This gathering, convened by Pope Francis, has been two years in the making. It will last from October 3 to 28 for three-and-a-half weeks of deliberation, presentation, and discussion by bishops and aided by key experts and young people.

That excitement is also balanced by a sense of humble and eager anticipation as people around Rome (and elsewhere) are asking: What comes of this synod? Where do we go from here? How do we get there? What role will a synod play in the midst of the challenges we face? It is tempting to offer our own answers, thinking them to be the “silver bullet” that moves us forward.

And yet, at the opening Mass, the first reading (Philippians 2:1-4) set a different tone: “There must be no competition among you. . . .Always consider the other person better than yourself, so that nobody thinks of his own interests first, but everyone considers other people’s interests instead.”

The opening Mass was a reminder that patient humility, trusting in others, and a willingness to explore new possibilities are as much a part of this particular synod as the vibrant joy that youth and young adults bring to the Church.

In the last part of his homily, Pope Francis reminded the synod fathers that they were youth or young adults at the close of the Second Vatican Council when Pope Paul VI offered a final message aimed at young people: “That message which we ourselves heard in our youth will do us much good if we revisit it in our hearts.” Through this, the Holy Father was laying a framework of humility for everyone.

No one has all the answers, and at the same time, everyone has some really good answers.

Being open to hearing the wisdom in others' voices was the tone that was set in the first hours of this monthlong journey. That was the feeling around Rome on opening synod day. After two years of careful consultation and, perhaps surprisingly in light of current events, the mood was patient and humble optimism.

Who knows what may emerge, but as the journey begins, in the very square where two colossal statues of Sts. Peter and Paul gaze down in silent expectation, Paul's letter to the Philippians and the successor of Peter have set the tone for this moment: In a culture of quick search engines and self-determination, patience and personal humility will be difficult—but it may be exactly what we need right now.



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