

OPINION

# Launching out into the deep

This is indeed a significant moment in the life of the People of God in Malta. The Diocesan Synod came to a colourful and joyful close last June, during the celebration of the Pentecost Vigil, in front of the Cathedral church, in Mdina. In the meantime, the sweltering heat of the past summer months did not deter many of those actively involved in the synod process from faithfully pursuing their tasks. No momentum was lost. In fact, the implementation phase of the synod is now underway.

On September 29, the Archbishop, Mgr Joseph Mercieca approved the eighth synod documents, four years to the day when, in 1999, he had inaugurated the synod, calling it "an extraordinary grace for the Church in Malta".

The first document, which has just been published, is that on "A Vision of the Church as Communion". Many have described this text as pivotal and fundamental because it provides the important key to reading and interpreting the other documents. It offers the leitmotif for a Church which is convinced of the renewal it has experienced under the all-transforming action of the Spirit. Faithful to the spirit of Vatican II, and in the light of the teaching of Pope John Paul II, the Church in Malta is firmly committed to being a sacrament and a school of communion.

This synod document reminds all the members of the Church in Malta of their duty to continue forging new bonds of communion, to strengthen existing ones and to heal where there is division or poor collaboration. The guiding light of the document comes from the Master's words: "May they all be one, just as, Father, you are in me and I am in you, so that they also may be one in us, so that the world may believe it was you who sent me" (Jn 17,21).

While continuing to regard the Church as mother and teacher, the communitarian discernment during the various phases of the synod has revealed another image of the Church, indeed a complementary image to the one mentioned and to which we have been accustomed for centuries.

Fr Hector Scerri

**'The complementary image of sister and servant seeks to highlight other dimensions of the life and mission of the Church in Malta.'**

The new vision portrays a Church which is sister and servant. This image gradually came to light after much active discussion and profound reflection on the realities we are now experiencing, as the People of God in Malta at the dawn of the third millennium, living as we are at the confluence of diverse cultures and contrasting values. Not that the traditional image of mother and teacher is obsolete... Far from it! The complementary image of sister and servant seeks to highlight other dimensions of the life and mission of the Church in Malta.

The Church in our island continues to discover and be faithful to its mission as it seeks to accompany men and women as they journey through life. Far from abdicating her role as teacher and bearer of the Truth preached by her Master, she strives to walk with them in the ups and downs and in the meanderings they experience. As sister, she commits herself anew to be in dialogue with all men and women of good will, including those who are lukewarm, or perhaps living on the fringes of the Christian community, if not outside it. As a servant Church, she seeks to instill in her members a more radical and authentic imitation of the Lord who "came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mt 20,28).

The document on "A Vision of the Church as Communion", like the other seven synod documents, offers a plethora of pastoral suggestions for a more vibrant Christian community in Malta. Among the many proposals (quite a daunting task ahead for the synod implementation groups!), the following are to be underlined: seeking

and discovering different ministries and talents in the parish community (or pastoral zone, or religious group); more collaboration between priests and the laity; cooperation among diocesan and religious clergy; neighbouring parishes sharing human and material resources; the unique role of women in the Church; the parish community vis-à-vis individuals with different needs; an authentic spirit of communion in parish pastoral councils, other parochial groups, religious organisations and movements; the formation of Christian lay persons who can dedicate themselves and bear witness to Christian values in the political, economic and professional spheres and in trade unions and other social bodies.

We are convinced that the Holy Spirit has been guiding the Church during this marvelous synod experience. We are being summoned to be open to the promptings of the Spirit who at this particular moment in our history is calling the Church in Malta to be sister and servant. This implies that at all levels, we, the living stones of the local Church, are being reminded of our duty to make a preferential option for the poor and the marginalised. Our responsibilities are great. Let us not fear being prophetic if we want to heal the deep wounds of division which exist in various facets of the Maltese nation. Let us live up to the call of being men and women for others and with others. Let us not fear launching out into the deep!

Fr Scerri was a member of the working group that prepared the document on "A Vision of the Church as Communion" for the Synod Assembly.

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