



by Bro MARIANO DI VITO

On 25 October, the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops treating the topic: “the vocation and mission of the family in the Church and the contemporary world”, draws to a close. At the end of this month, therefore, ends the long synodal journey commenced a year ago, with the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, and that continued during this time with the task-entrusted by Pope Francis to the Synods of the Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris*, the episcopal conferences, the dicasteries of the Roman Curia and the Union of Superiors General – “to mature, with true spiritual discernment, the ideas [proposed by the assembly] and to find concrete solutions to the many difficulties and innumerable challenges that families must confront” (*III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*). But this journey has been even longer; if one recalls that reflection on the family began already in the Fall of 1980 with the VI Synod of Bishops, and with St. John Paul II’s subsequent apostolic exhortation: “*Familiaris Consortio*.”

The ordinary Assembly underway wishes to be a guidance to families not just “to respond to today’s challenges,” but also and above all, to the “calling from God to an ever-increas-

ing awareness of its missionary identity as a domestic Church, even to the point of “going outside itself”. A mission that is especially urgent “in a world often marked by loneliness and sadness” (*Instrumentum Laboris*, 5). The reflections of the Fathers of the synod, therefore, commence with “the reality of the family today in all its complexity, with both its lights and shadows,” including “the crisis of faith, witnessed among a great many Catholics, which oftentimes underlies the crisis in marriage and the family” (*ibid*, 6). This is a true pastoral challenge. In fact, “only a minority of people lives, supports and encourages the Catholic Church’s teaching on marriage and the family, seeing in it the goodness of God’s creative plan. Marriages, whether religious or not, are decreasing in number; while separation and divorce is on the rise.... In various cultures young people are displaying a fear to make definitive commitments, including a commitment concerning a family. In general, an extreme individualism, increasingly becoming widespread, focuses uppermost on gratifying desires which do not lead to total personal fulfilment. The development of a consumer society has separated sexuality from procreation. This fact is also one of the underlying causes of an increasing decline in the birth rate, which, in some places, is related to poverty or the inability to care for children; and in others, to the unwillingness to accept responsibility and to the idea that children might infringe on freely pursuing personal goals” (*ibid*, 7).

This complicated reality triggered from the beginning of the extraordinary Assembly great hope and with the current ordinary Assembly, and also Pope Francis’ apostolic letter:

THE FAMILY: A PRECIOUS PEARL!

“The Lord Jesus Gentle Judge,” reforming and quickening the process for the nullity of marriages, has intensified. The title alone of this letter makes clear the intention to rediscover the Lord’s merciful countenance, something often obscured by pharisaical legalism and which Jesus Himself denounced. Not by chance the new norms will come into force on 8 December, the very day when the Jubilee of Mercy begins. And the conclusion too, of the “*Instrumentum Laboris*” of the Synod pronounces very clearly that this pastoral inquest “take place in the light of the Extraordinary Holy Year of Mercy, proclaimed by Pope Francis” (*ibid*, 147).

The Synod is not gathering at the bedside of a dying and outdated institution, but on the contrary is working on behalf of all men and women of good will, so that the first elementary cell of society may become again the maternal support of the Church, and spurred to continue its privileged place of life and future planning of humanity.

One thing is certain and that is that the hoped for more open and broader understanding of the different dramas of today’s families, can only take place upon the riverbed of Sacred Scripture, to which every believer must submit, just as our Saint Pio did his whole life.

We must support the synod with our prayers and knowing that it is the Lord who guides His Church, and that once again He may return light and splendour to the family, a true precious pearl that He placed in our fragile hands. ✠

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