



Office of the Bishop

Intervention by San Diego Catholic Bishop Robert W. McElroy

Bishops participating in a World or Regional Synod issue formal statements, called “Interventions.” San Diego Bishop McElroy is a participant in the Synod of Bishops for the Amazon, held in Rome from Oct. 6 to 27, 2019. The following is the Intervention Bishop McElroy shared during the Synod’s opening week:

Throughout these days, our focus has been on the core mission of this gathering: namely, identifying pathways through which the Church in the Amazon region can ever more effectively proclaim the salvation of Jesus Christ in its fullness, so that all men and women of the region, especially indigenous peoples, might find in the Church a true sacrament of God’s love and the pursuit of justice for the poor and for the earth.

I would like to point for a moment to a secondary, but important, dimension of this synodal process: namely the contributions that the Church in the Amazon is making to the life and dialogue of the universal Church.

One critical contribution to the world Church lies in the gift of a lived synodal experience that places at its very center the dreams and the sufferings of the people of God. It is a synodal experience that has privileged the perceptions and experiences of those continually excluded from meaningful participation in Church and society. It places the pastoral imperative at the heart of the Church’s theology and mission. It prioritizes listening to the Spirit, bold and honest discussion, and an unswerving focus on the mercy of God. In all of these ways, the Church of the Amazon has illuminated a grace-filled pathway for the embrace of synodality that will enrich regional and local churches throughout the world.

A second contribution of this synod to the universal Church and the world lies in its witness to the nature and power of ecological conversion. There are two prerequisites to such a conversion. The first is the recognition of the empirical reality of the environmental destruction that threatens our planet. The second is the affective acceptance of creation as a sacred gift whose future is entrusted to our care.

This Synod advances both. Sections 45 and 46 of the Instrumentum Laboris point to the monstrous destruction of the Amazon, which is God's most vital and beautiful garden on our planet. Section 56 points to the traditional relationship of the indigenous peoples of the region to nature as one of intimacy, sacredness, giftedness and care, and discerns in this architecture of the soul the animating elements of ecological conversion that are common to every culture.

Finally, Instrumentum Laboris #24 speaks of good living. In my country of the United States, the good life means a life of luxury and ease. For the peoples of the Amazon, good living means connectedness to faith, to self, to others, to the land. It points to the unity of all of human existence: work, rest, celebration and relationships, and refuses to accept the fractionalization of human existence that modern life places upon us all. It rejects grave disparities of wealth and social inequality. It breathes with the spirit of God.

The specific form of good living that exists for the indigenous peoples of the Amazon will not be transferable to most other cultures in the world. But its underlying themes of connectedness, moderation, balance and sharing must become the norm for all peoples in reevaluating our lifestyles if we are to escape the lures of materialism and build a sustainable society for our world.