

1st Lenten Conference at the Heart of Mary Shrine, Carvalhos, Pedroso, Vila Nova de Gaia

Synod and World Youth Day

D. Manuel Linda, Bishop of the Diocese of Porto

The Lenten Conferences opened their 14th edition on 26 February 2023, at the Shrine of the Heart of Mary, Carvalhos, Pedroso, with a talk given by D. Manuel Linda, Bishop of the Diocese of Porto, before an audience of more than 200 people. The session began with a beautiful song performed by Davide Barros. Then, after a brief presentation of the speaker by José Manuel Cruz, Bishop Manuel Linda began his talk, entitled "The Synod and World Youth Days".

The first part of the talk focused on the synodal path that has been taken by the Church. After a brief historical background on the revitalization of Synods provided by the Second Vatican Council and continued by successive popes, Bishop Manuel Linda emphasized the role of Pope Francis in extending participation in the Synod to all the people of the Church and not just the synod assembly and certain experts. He went on to indicate that this elevated the idea of the "People of God", since everyone, even everyone, is called to the edification and renewal of the Church. He also explained that "synodality" expresses the nature of the Church - the Church is the People of God - a people that walks together, gathered in an assembly called by Jesus and in the power of the Holy Spirit to proclaim the Gospel.

The speaker recalled that the synodal challenge of Pope John XXIII: "Church, what do you say about yourself?" is a question that the Church must permanently ask itself, since a reforming attitude is intrinsic to its nature as an entity on a journey, in constant dynamism. For Mgr Manuel Linda, the Synod is to listen to what the Spirit says to the Church and incorporates communion (unity of faith and life, in which all are gathered despite their differences), participation (all who form the People of God commit themselves to mutual listening and dialogue) and mission (the Church exists to announce that Jesus Christ is the only saviour of humanity). In conclusion, he stated that the great purpose of the Synod is to announce the Gospel and, entering the second part of his communication, he specified that the World Youth Days are synodal, because they are evangelization, that is, the Days express concretely what a Church that lives in Synod is.

Continuing his reflection on the World Youth Days, Bishop Manuel Linda began by explaining that Pope John Paul II realised that the youth is a "land of mission" and that, to involve them, the Church would need to be festive and joyful, and so, in 1985, he pushed for the creation of the first World Youth Days. Today, after so many editions, involving more than a million young people in each edition, it is recognised that the Days have changed the face of the Church, that it is much more joyful and attractive than before and that they nurture its reforming character. The whole of society has been somewhat shaken by the realisation that young people continue to connect with the Church and to seek Jesus Christ in her, guided by a great empathy with the Pope.

In the opinion of the Bishop of Porto, the days helped to make it more visible to the world that the Church is a proposal of a relationship with a Person, rather than a doctrinal structure. At this point, the speaker described some "cardinal points" of the Days: its festive character ("a celebration of faith and faith in celebration"); a true experience of Church (a Church that is close, that uses the language of closeness); a missionary experience (with the Days, young people have become evangelizers of other young people and of the whole of society); an occasion for vocational discernment (the Days have led many young people to vocational discernment either

to marriage or to the consecrated life); a call to holiness (to live the way that leads to Jesus, choosing Him in the various circumstances of life); an experience of pilgrimage (a pilgrimage through ourselves, going out of ourselves to meet Jesus); an experience of universal brotherhood (young people from all over the world meet together and are not at odds with the Church).

To conclude, Mgr Manuel Linda drew a parallel between the Days and the biblical passage on the conversion of Zacchaeus:

- Zacchaeus was curious to see Jesus; so are the young people who go to the Journeys;
- The publican was captivated; many young people who are on the "periphery" of the Church go to the Days and are captivated;
- Jesus welcomes Zacchaeus first of all - "I want to stay at your house" - many young people feel this way during the Days;
- Jesus does not reproach Zacchaeus for what he is, but changes his heart, causing him to be converted, just like many young people on the Days of Journeying.
- Jesus provokes the society of the time by going to welcome into the home of a sinner; the Days also "provoke" those who only saw a "dying Church".
- Jesus allows Zacchaeus to reach the "great goal" - "Today salvation has come to this house" - and the same can be said of so many young people who, starting from the Days, experience the love of God in their lives and in the world.

D. Manuel Linda finished his talk by expressing the wish that salvation may reach the many thousands of young people who will take part in the World Youth Days.

At the end of the talk, Davide Barros sang another song and, finally, Father Marçal Pereira, promoter of the Lenten Conferences, thanked the guest, the collaborators and all the public who had adhered en masse to this event.

José Manuel Cruz