

## JOURNEYING TOGETHER

# Synodality, discernment, choices

Thank you for the invitation to share some thoughts with you on the need to journey together. Greetings to each and every one of you.

It is wonderful to be here in Valdocco which, from the outset, has been a synodal laboratory of spirituality, education and pastoral ministry. Don Bosco was never alone and, since the very beginning of his work, he involved many people, sharing his life dedicated to the young with them. It is also good to experience an extraordinary assembly like this together, because it is a valuable opportunity to look to the past with gratitude, to live in the here and now with intelligence and to plan for the future with courage and hope.

My job is to help you enter into the rhythm of “synodality” This morning we will try to understand what this journey that the Catholic Church is undertaking means. You know that precisely over these days in Rome, the second session of the Synod is under way, on the theme: “For a synodal Church: communion, participation, mission”. The first session was held in October 2023, so now we are waiting for important elements for the Church’s journey from this second and final session.

I will divide my talk into three parts. The first is dedicated to shedding light on the notion of “synodality”, the second on the question of “discernment” and the third on the matter of “choices”. These are three logical steps that start with theory and arrive at practice.

### 1. Synodality

The first word that I will bring to your attention is “synodality”. You have certainly heard it in many contexts over recent years, so it is worth our while to ask ourselves what it means and what are its consequences.

#### 1.1. *The ten lepers*

We all know that the word “synodality” means, in etymological terms, “setting out together”, “walking or journeying together”, “setting out on the same road together”.

Let us begin with the Word of God I invite you to consider the Gospel text that tells of the healing of the ten lepers. Let’s try to listen to it with attention and empathy:

<sup>11</sup> On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. <sup>12</sup> As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, <sup>13</sup> they called out, saying, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!’ <sup>14</sup> When he saw them, he said to them, ‘Go and show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went, they were made clean. <sup>15</sup> Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. <sup>16</sup> He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. <sup>17</sup> Then Jesus asked, ‘Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?’ <sup>18</sup> Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?’ <sup>19</sup> Then he said to him, ‘Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well’ (Lk 17:11-19).

There are many little details that emerge. Further on we will pick up some these. It is very interesting to note how these ten lepers are healed precisely at the moment they begin to set off together while together going to present themselves to the priests, following the Lord Jesus’ command. At the *Angelus* on 13 October 2019 Pope Francis commented on this passage. Let us listen once again to what he said, since it will be most

instructive for us here together:

In today's brief Gospel, there are several verbs of motion. It is quite striking that the lepers are not healed as they stand before Jesus; it is only afterwards, as they were walking. The Gospel tells us that: "As they went, they were made clean" (v. 14). They were healed by going up to Jerusalem, that is, while walking uphill. On the journey of life, purification takes place along the way, a way that is often uphill since it leads to the heights. Faith calls for journey, a "going out" from ourselves, and it can work wonders if we abandon our comforting certainties, if we leave our safe harbours and our cosy nests.

Faith increases by giving, and grows by taking risks. Faith advances when we make our way equipped with trust in God. Faith advances with humble and practical steps, like the steps of the lepers or those of Naaman who went down to bathe in the river Jordan (cf. 2 *Kings* 5:14-17). The same is true for us. We advance in faith by showing humble and practical love, exercising patience each day, and praying constantly to Jesus as we keep pressing forward on our way. There is a further interesting aspect to the journey of the lepers: they move together. The Gospel tells us that, "as they went, they were made clean" (v. 14). The verbs are in the plural. Faith means also walking together, never alone.

### 1.2. *The concept of synodality*

The word "synod" appears only once in the gospels. It is the charming little episode where Jesus as a teenager had stayed back in Jerusalem while his parents were returning home: "Assuming that he was in the group of travellers (*sunodi*), they went a day's journey. Then they started to look for him among their relatives and friends" (Lk 2:44) Here is the notion of synodality at its simplest: fellow travellers, caravan, a group of pilgrims who are quite heterogeneous but united by the same goal, going to the Temple of the Lord to pay homage to him, and then returning home full of joy. What keeps us united is the Lord, being saved by him and walking towards him in time and history. We are part of a network, dependent on each other, entrusted to each other:

Synodality expresses the fact that we are all of the Church and within the Church. The believers are *σύνοδοι*, companions on the journey, called to play an active role inasmuch as they share in the one priesthood of Christ and are meant to receive the various charisms given by the Holy Spirit in view of the common good (INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Synodality in the life and mission of the Church*, 3 March 2018, no. 54).

The Church is "the people of God", of which we too are part: this is her precise being, her deepest reality. It is not a metaphor or an explanatory image, but it is the most accurate reminder of its identity: we are a people that the Lord purchased with his own blood, walking in history among humanity and destined for the eternity of God.

Now, synodality specifically affirms that the People of God *are on their way*. As the best document so far on the subject, already mentioned above, states, "synodality manifests the 'pilgrim' character of the Church" (INTERNATIONAL THEOLOGICAL COMMISSION, *Synodality in the life and mission of the Church*, 3 March 2018, no. 49). Thus the radical historicity of the Church is emphasised, its being inserted in the present time. Synodality focuses on its *way of proceeding* and on its *relational style*, to see if its progress in human history and its way of living within it are faithful to the gospel of God in all respects.

Recognising this today is increasingly decisive. The Church is not a static, stationary, blocked, rigid reality, but it is dynamic and vivacious. It is a life that develops along the way and in relationship, because it has the form of an event, an encounter and a journey. Synodality, therefore, urges us to *seriously assess the relational quality of our being as Church, its dynamics of vertical communion and horizontal fraternity*. Sometimes, even within the Church, envy and jealousy prevail, along with competition and rivalry, gossip and complaining. Synodality asks of us first of all that we work at a relational level.

### 1.3. *Seven elements for a "synodal spirituality"*

Here is a first commitment to tackle these days well: to grow in a synodal mentality, in the determined and decisive will to walk, journey together, feeling that we are brothers and sisters in the same boat, responsible

for each other. What are the ingredients of a “synodal spirituality”? Over these days you are spending together, what will you need to grow in? I would like to pass on seven elements to you that are given to us by the biblical text we have heard and that, in my opinion, will help us to adopt a correct synodal stance.

First, *knowing that we are lepers*. Being aware of our own frailty and sinfulness. We are here as sinners, aware of our failings. People who look in the mirror and recognise themselves as being inadequate. People who know they are never up to the vocation and mission they have received as a gift.

Second, *going to meet the Lord*. Healing and salvation are never something that comes from us, our abilities, our projects and our initiatives. From our will to power. Going to meet the Lord means overcoming all kinds of pastoral Pelagianism, entrusting ourselves to him always.

Third, *stopping at a distance*: the ten lepers do not dare to get too close to the Lord. There is a primacy of contemplation and respect. It is an invitation to pause in prayer and worship before him. So often has Pope Francis, in the synodal journey of the Universal Church, said that the starting point is adoration.

Fourth, *knowing how to cry out together “have mercy on us”*: recognising, as Past Pupils gathered here, our need for healing and salvation. The cry that asks for mercy attracts the compassion of the Lord. It is the cry of the truth of the people of God who feel the need to entrust themselves to their God. It is a communal cry, a “we” that speaks to Jesus.

Fifth, *following the Lord’s commands*. We are gathered here not to do our own will, but to do what he, the Lord, will tell us to do, to harmonise with his will. The lepers go to present themselves to the priests, and we wait in these days for the presence and the word of God, certain that he is here among us and speaks to us.

Sixth, *setting out together*: journeying together, because it is the only way that we are healed and grow! The miracle takes place while we are walking, journeying together. Only by setting out together can there be the conditions for healing to take place. In the effort and courage required to walk together, we are healed, never otherwise.

Finally, *learning to say thank you*: gratitude is the unmistakable sign of those who have met the Lord. May these days be for you days of thanksgiving and praise to the Lord who never abandons you and always accompanies you with his strong and gentle presence, firm and sweet, mysterious and concrete.

## 2. Discernment

Let’s take a second step together. Actually, these days are for you a privileged moment of “discernment”. Precisely, as Pope Francis invited us to do at the beginning of the universal synodal journey, having an experience of spiritual discernment:

The Synod is a journey of spiritual discernment, of ecclesial discernment which is done in adoration, prayer, in contact with the Word of God. The Word opens us to discernment and enlightens it. It guides the Synod, preventing it from becoming a Church convention, a study group or a political gathering, a parliament, but rather a grace-filled event, a process of healing guided by the Spirit. (FRANCIS, *Homily for the Holy mass at the opening of the synodal journey*, 10 October 2021).

### 2.1. Solomon’s dream

Discernment is a gift from God. Something to ask for, not to claim. To accept and not to be bought or conquered. Solomon’s famous dream helps us to walk on the path of humility of those who know how to ask for a docile heart on tiptoe, and to wait patiently for God to grant us this gift. Solomon, son of David, is to succeed him on the throne, but he is young and inexperienced.

We are in the fragile situation of a “change at the top”, of a change in government: an old king is ending his mandate and a young king is beginning his risky adventure as a leader. Let us listen attentively to the lengthy tale:

<sup>5</sup> At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, ‘Ask what I should give you.’ <sup>6</sup> And Solomon said, ‘You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he

walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart towards you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. <sup>7</sup> And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. <sup>8</sup> And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. <sup>9</sup> Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil; for who can govern this your great people? <sup>10</sup> It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. <sup>11</sup> God said to him, 'Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, <sup>12</sup> I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. <sup>13</sup> I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honour all your life; no other king shall compare with you. <sup>14</sup> If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life.' <sup>15</sup> Then Solomon awoke; it had been a dream. He came to Jerusalem, where he stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. He offered up burnt-offerings and offerings of well-being, and provided a feast for all his servants (1Kings 3:5-15).

The text is, as always, very rich and deep. It speaks for itself. In the dream Solomon asks for a docile heart, and God, after being amazed by this wise request, gives him the gift of “discernment in judging” in abundance. He is more than satisfied: he is granted a “wise and discerning mind” and, together, many other gifts.

But the acid test immediately arrives. A difficult case to tackle, where Solomon’s wisdom emerges: two prostitutes arrive, along with two children, one dead, one alive, and both claim theirs to be the one that is alive. In the absence of DNA evidence, Solomon, through an interlocutory decision – by cutting the child in two – reveals the true maternity (cf. 1 Kings 3:16-28). Faced with the request of the real mother not to cut the child in two but to give him to the other, he recognises that this is her son.

Here is the central element of discernment: the wise man is the one who first of all knows that the truth does not coincide with himself, that is, that he does not possess it as his property! The wise person knows they are not the producer of truth, but the one who can cleverly bring it to light and then is able to recognise it accurately. We will pick up other elements of this instructive story further on.

## 2.2. *The discernment method*

In a second step I would like to tell you that discernment is a gift that must be put to good use through an appropriate methodology. I invite you over these days to strengthen the development of the process of discernment indicated by *Evangelii gaudium* in no. 51 and characterised by three verbs (recognise, interpret, choose). This is the process recent Church events have followed, such as the Synod on young people. They are not three independent moments but a single journey: each phase will allow you to take a step that will be the starting point of the next phase.

*Recognise.* The first step is to look and listen. It is a question of understanding not only with our intelligence, but above all with a heart capable of evangelical compassion, empathic listening and merciful gaze (Cf. *Lk* 7:13; 10:33; 15:20; *Mt* 9:36). This first step requires paying attention to things as they are. It requires humility and closeness, so that we can tune in and perceive what the joys and hopes, anxieties and pains of the people we are accompanying are. The same looking and listening, full of solicitude and care, must be directed towards what our communities and our environments are going through together with the people engaged in pastoral work.

*Interpret.* The second step is an examination of what has been recognised, through recourse to criteria for interpreting and evaluating. It is a matter of truth and honesty, seeking the causes and expressing the reasons for what we have recognised. In order to formulate balanced evaluations, it will be important to avoid an idealising or blaming attitude. This is a delicate and challenging phase, which will urge you to interpret what you find in reality in the light of the gospel. What must emerge here are the Salesian charismatic criteria as points of reference for a verification of what we are doing.

*Choose.* Only by letting ourselves be enlightened by the vocation accepted is it possible to understand to what concrete steps the Spirit calls us and in what direction to move to respond to his call. In this phase

discernment means arranging the means in order to achieve the end, starting with the choice of the most appropriate ones. With this intention, it is necessary to examine attitudes, processes and structures, and to cultivate the inner freedom necessary to choose those that allow us to follow the Spirit and abandon those that turn out to be less capable of achieving the purpose. This step will lead to identifying where an intervention for reform is needed, a change in our pastoral practices and a renewal of structures.

### **2.3. *The stance of discernment***

Discernment is not a passing trend, but the right spiritual style to live in the midst of an era of change, where we do not have pre-packaged solutions and the “it has always been done this way” no longer works.

Furthermore, when discernment becomes communal, as well as discipline and methodology an appropriate stance is needed, an appropriate spiritual attitude. On 3 October 2018, the first day of the Synod on Young People, Pope Francis said in this regard:

To speak frankly and listen openly are fundamental if the Synod is to be a process of discernment. Discernment is not an advertising slogan, it is not an organizational technique, or a fad of this pontificate, but an interior attitude rooted in an act of faith. Discernment is the method and at the same time the goal we set ourselves: it is based on the conviction that God is at work in world history, in life’s events, in the people I meet and who speak to me. For this reason, we are called to listen to what the Spirit suggests to us, with methods and in paths that are often unpredictable.

In such an important event as this one is, it is important to grow in docility of heart to become wise in judging. The discernment that leads to wisdom is the exact opposite of pride and superiority, of those who believe themselves to be masters of the truth. “Truth” is, instead, clearly an originally relational concept, objectively dialogical, necessarily not self-referential. For this reason, the docile heart is above all a humble heart: aware that it is not the seat of truth, because we can recognise the truth and never create it ourselves.

In the case of Solomon, the truth lies precisely in the encounter between the emotion of a mother’s maternal feelings for her son and the docile heart of the young king. As a man who has become wise, he sees this: the inner self, the emotion, the maternal instinct which perceive and treasure everything with love. It is there, in the maternal instinct, that the merciful and patient God resides, slow to anger and great in love.

There is a shift from outwardness to inwardness. Solomon thus shares in God’s perception, whose ultimate criterion is well attested by the prophet Samuel: “they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart” (1 Sam 16:7). A truth that the wise man (Solomon) infallibly recognises. It is there that the decision takes the right turn: the previous decision, the “interlocutory” one that ordered the child to be cut in two, only served to bring out the truth, which Solomon does not possess in his own right but which he can only recognise! His judgement is infallible and clear: “That is his mother”!

Solomon invites us, through what he has asked and what he has done, to enter the rhythm of discernment which is the rhythm of waiting and gestation. The young king takes his time, asks the right questions, asks the mothers to express their thoughts, gives them the floor. Before he handles the situation he carries it in his womb, he entering a period of gestation. The experience of gestation and the experience of discernment are very close to each other.

This brings us back to the need to ask for the gift of discernment rather than thinking about exercising it in a masterly way. It is sometimes easy to make use of discernment to get your ideas across and impose your points of view. Holding wisdom, mercy and prophecy together is instead proper to the person who knows how to discern in the Spirit. A difficult and delicate art that needs profound silence, great respect and a lot of humility.

## **3. Choices**

You are here over these days to make decisions about the life and mission of the World Confederation of Past Pupils. We have seen that choice is internal to discernment, in the sense that it is its intrinsic fulfilment.

A discernment that does not arrive at a choice is not an authentic discernment. So here too, in this matter of discernment, we take three steps.

### 3.1. *The Council of Jerusalem*

At the heart of the Acts of the Apostles is the story of one of the most critical ecclesial moments of the first decades of the Church's existence. We are talking about the Council of Jerusalem where a tension generated by the attempt to impose the practices of the ancient Mosaic law on converts from the pagan world risked dramatically dividing the first community of believers.

The stakes were obviously high: is it the observance of the law that saves or faith in Jesus Christ? Is the sacrifice of Christ on the cross the source of saving grace, or should this grace be accompanied by other religious practices? The opinions were discordant: some said that faith in Jesus had not abolished ancient practices, while others claimed that everything, fulfilled in Jesus, should be relativised or even completely eliminated. So all up a serious and important case where the hopes of finding a shared point of agreement did not seem very high. There was a risk of a rift. Someone had to take a stand.

The discussion begins as follows:

<sup>1</sup> Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, 'Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.' <sup>2</sup> And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question with the apostles and the elders (*Acts* 15:1-2).

They report what happened, but some Pharisees who became Christians demand that the converted pagans be circumcised and that they keep the law of Moses. Faced with the matter "The apostles and the elders met together to consider this matter" (*Acts* 15:6). This begins a time of ecclesial discernment.

A great discussion ensues. Peter takes the floor also bringing his experience in this regard and stating in no uncertain terms that everyone, regardless of their ethnic, cultural, social and religious origin, "we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus" (*Acts* 15:11). Thus Paul and Barnabas take up the word again, then James expands the reflection and makes some concrete proposals to resolve the dispute while maintaining communion with all the actors in the field. At the end of the journey of community discernment, a decision is reached with which the authority of the Church completes the journey for the good of all:

<sup>22</sup> Then the apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole church, decided to choose men from among their members and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leaders among the brothers, <sup>23</sup> with the following letter: 'The brothers, both the apostles and the elders, to the believers of Gentile origin in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings. <sup>24</sup> Since we have heard that certain persons who have gone out from us, though with no instructions from us, have said things to disturb you and have unsettled your minds, <sup>25</sup> we have decided unanimously to choose representatives[i] and send them to you, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, <sup>26</sup> who have risked their lives for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>27</sup> We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth. <sup>28</sup> For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to impose on you no further burden than these essentials: <sup>29</sup> that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled and from fornication. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell' (*Acts* 15:22-29).

The result of this letter delivered to the converted brothers of Antioch is more than positive: "When its members read it, they rejoiced at the exhortation" (*Acts* 15:31). Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers.' (*Acts* 15:32). This outcome restores joy and hope to all members of the community, no one excluded.

What is edifying is the way the first community proceeds. A dynamic of fraternity emerges in addressing problems – where unity is formed around the apostles and in communion with them – and the spiritual freedom of the early Church, which is not afraid to give a voice to each member of the community: the converted Pharisees, Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, James. From the beginning, the Christian community seems to follow Paul's advice: "Do not quench the Spirit. not despise the words of prophets, but test everything;

hold fast to what is good' (1Thes 5:19-21).

It is good to recognise that the outcome of good community discernment is a peaceful joy. The mark of evangelical choices is deep joy! The decisions taken receive gospel confirmation through the fact that they make people happy and instil courage. In this way, all the members of the community are strengthened, who are thus invited to persevere on the path of following the Lord.

### **3.2. *The need to set out from our charismatic origins***

After seeing the way forward of the first Christian community, we come to ourselves. Just as the first Christian community allowed itself to be guided in its choices by the criteria that come from the truth of the gospel, so we, participants in the Salesian charism, are called to be inspired by the truth of the charism that Don Bosco has given us. Here I would like to pick up some of the matters I shared some months ago, at Valdocco, on the occasion of the last World Advisory Council Meeting of the Salesian Family (21 May 2024).

First *let us overcome the temptation to self-referentiality!* First of all, let's have the courage to "go out". Because the risk of every charism has always been the risk of self-referentiality. That is, to be a somewhat parallel and independent Church, a happy island where things work perfectly and therefore it is good to remain within our four walls, in our comfort zone.

Second, *let us regain our missionary identity!* The year 2025 marks an anniversary of great importance for the Salesian Family: around mid-November 1875 the first Salesian missionaries set sail from Genoa to reach Patagonia. Don Bosco was there at their departure. 150 years have passed since that epic and adventurous moment, and since then thousands of missionaries have left to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus in every part of the world.

Third, *let's clarify the order in the mission once again!* Every charism that the Lord gives to his Church is well represented by the image of a tree. The root is its *spirituality*. Here we go to the level of the depth of friendship with the Lord and the originality of our charism, which is first of all a special way of standing before God and living the Christian life. The second element is that of the trunk, which well represents the solidity of *formation*. Common and shared formation comes to the fore here. The third element is *ministry* in educational terms, what makes our mission concrete. In iconography we can say: the branches, the leaves, the flowers and especially the fruits. It is the most visible thing, but if it is not supported by the trunk of formation and by the root of spirituality, it risks being a superficial and not at all effective activity.

Fourth, *let us listen to God's dreams for our family!* We are experiencing the bicentenary of the dream at nine years of age. Starting again from this fundamental dream, which guided Don Bosco throughout his life, has been a reason to return to the origins. This dream, as this year's Strenna says, is truly "a dream that makes us dream", that drives us on and enables us to listen to the dreams of young people and also to be willing to dream, that is, to let God show us the path we are called to follow.

Fifth, *let us start out once more with renewed enthusiasm from the Valdocco option!* Pope Francis, on the occasion of the 28th General Chapter of the Salesian Congregation which was held here in Valdocco from February to March 2020, addressed a moving letter to Chapter members. In that text on 4 March 2020 he speaks constantly of the *Valdocco option*. What is this all about? He invited us to revive the gift we received through Don Bosco's original apostolic experience. But what is this gift? They are the poorest and most abandoned young people! We have received them from God himself as the centre of our existence and the heart of our educational mission. This is we must always return to rediscover our identity and mission as Past Pupils of Don Bosco!

### **3.3. *Seven criteria for making good choices***

Let me conclude by projecting myself forward, towards concrete dynamics. The outcome of the Council of Jerusalem is concise and precise, essential: "abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols and from blood and from what is strangled[j] and from fornication" (Acts 15:29). The quality and effectiveness of these days you will spend together is not proportional to the length of some *Final Document* that you may be called on to approve! The decisions, in order to be effective, must be brief and to the point.

What characteristics should the choices we make have? Let me bring to your attention seven criteria to check if we are making good choices.

First, a good choice is the result of *convergence*. The end point of a consensus that has matured in dialogue and in sincere and frank discussion. The result of discernment well made. It is difficult for a choice born in a climate of imposition to bear fruit. Instead, it risks becoming indigestible.

Second, a positive choice is *engaging*, that is, it has the strength to set passions in motion, to awaken desires, ignite emotions, open up to collaboration and generate shared responsibility. A good decision touches the heart and enlightens the mind, involving people in a shared project.

Third, a valid choice is always *concrete*. It is neither theoretical nor difficult to achieve, but it can easily mobilise people. It is clear in its formulation and in its demands. It is logical in the steps to be taken and can be understood within the journey we are taking together.

Fourth, it is *feasible*. In other words it can be put into practice here and now with the human and material resources that are actually available. There must be the conditions that make it possible to make that choice, otherwise it becomes something oppressive for those of whom it is demanded, because they are asked to do something impossible to achieve.

Fifth, a proper choice is *sustainable*. It is not just suitable for a brief period, but must be able to stand over the medium and long term. Here too if we do not want to create areas of fatigue and depression, we cannot afford to make unreasonable choices.

Sixth, a choice must always be *appropriate*. The relationship between commitment and results achieved, between efforts made and concrete achievements should turn the scales in the right direction. Sometimes some choices involve a lot of time, economic resources and spiritual energies that are not compensated by adequate results.

Finally, a wise choice is always *generative*, that is, capable of awakening a community and giving birth to new life, offering a future and hope to those who are carrying it out. A generative choice is one capable of restoring enthusiasm, of supporting our lives by helping us return to the charismatic spirit of our origins.

Thanks you for your attention.

I hope that what I have tried to communicate to you can be useful to you in adopting a positive and constructive spirit, so as to face these days that you will spend together in the best way.

To conclude I am giving you three questions that can be useful in debate and discussion.



1. **Am I/are we maturing in a synodal mentality, stance and spirituality?**

How can I/we qualify it, improve it, implement it?

---

---

---

---

2. **Is the style of discernment part of my/our ordinary way of proceeding?**

How can I/we grow in taking on this spiritual discipline and methodology?

---

---

---

---

3. **Am I/we making convinced and coherent charismatic choices?**

How can I/we enhance and refine the path so we get to choose in the best way?

---

---

---

---

**ROSSANO SALA**

Salesian of Don Bosco

Full Professor of *Pastoral Theology* and *Youth Ministry* at the Pontifical Salesian University in Rome.

Editorial Director of *Elledici publishers*

Editor of the *Note di pastorale giovanile magazine*

Former Special Secretary of the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod on the theme *Young people, the faith and vocational discernment*

[sala@unisal.it](mailto:sala@unisal.it)