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Muchas gracias María Lía
Thank you so much
Merci
Obrigada
Grazie mille a tutti

It really is a great, great joy to be with you this evening - I'm going to speak in French - because if we are gathered here, it's because we already have this experience of walking together, as Church, in your various associations, in this union. [and] I am very grateful to the whole team at the General Secretariat of the Synod, and I also bring greetings from Cardinal Mario Grech, with whom I work, because just a few days after I was appointed, the President General of WUCWO was one of the first persons to contact me. I still remember our first meeting with Maria Lía and the Ecclesiastical Assistant at the time, who came to express their readiness to journey, to enter into this synodal process. Since the opening of the synod in October 2021, I have seen how active your union, your associations, you women and many of those present here have already been and how much you have participated in the synod process.

I've been asked this evening to share with you a little the experience, this synodal journey, the women on the synodal journey, but when I arrived here in Assisi, I said to myself, I'm the one who should keep quiet and listen to you. I imagine that many of you already have an experience. Who among you has had the opportunity, in your parish, in your diocese, in your teams, in your organisations, to take part in this Synod for a synodal Church, communion, participation, mission? Who among you has already participated in many ways?

A good number already...

It is so good that you are holding this General Assembly in Assisi. As you know, Assisi is a great place of pilgrimage, following in the footsteps of Francis of Assisi and Clare of Assisi. For my part, I remember very well, when I was 14 or 15, with my French diocese of Normandy, we came on pilgrimage to Assisi and that was a defining moment for me.

Why is it such a good thing? Because if we want to understand and live synodality, to be the synodal Church, we have to live like pilgrims walking together.

I like Pope Francis' way of explaining synodality: "Synodality is the way of being the Church today according to the will of God, in a dynamic of discerning and listening together to the voice of the Holy Spirit."

To live this Synod, to contribute to the synodal conversion of the Church, is to live our life as Christians. Living our Church in this style of pilgrimage, being pilgrims, missionaries, who journey with all the pilgrims of the world, of every belief, of every conviction, but with this profound attitude of listening, of listening to each other, of listening to the word of God in order to listen to the Holy Spirit, that is the most important thing.

If you look at the synod logo, the most important figure is the Holy Spirit. [There are children, older people, men, women, a bishop, a priest, a sister, a couple, a disabled person, all together, but what brings us together is the Holy Spirit.

So, if we really want to be a synodal Church, a Church like the one on this logo, a Church that is inclusive, welcoming, open to everyone, a Church that listens, a Church where everyone has something to learn from each other, we cannot be a Church without women.

A synodal Church that must listen to everyone, must particularly listen to women and through this synod, which was conceived as Pope Francis said, as a process of listening. [This is it] Listening at all levels, at the level of parishes, dioceses, the bishops are listening to the people of God, Pope Francis is listening to the bishops listening to the people, when we launched the synod in the preparatory document that you may have read, we immediately highlighted the challenge of listening to women. It was something that had already come up very strongly at the 2018 Youth Synod. The Church in 2018 held a synod of bishops on youth to question- and I am sure this is a concern for all of you...

All Catholic mothers want to pass on the faith to their children, all teachers and pastors want to continue proclaiming the Gospel and passing on the faith to young people.

Through the Synod for Young People, by listening to them, the bishops and the Pope have understood that the only way to transmit the faith in the world today is to be a synodal Church, a Church that begins by listening, because young people, like all of us and like women, [we would firstly like] we need to be listened. If you are here, it is because in your communities, in your families, in your parishes, in your organisations, you are protagonists, actresses in changing the world and building peace.

However, it is not just women who want to be protagonists, it is the whole diversity of the people of God. That is why, in the questionnaire that was given to launch the synodal process, which is a great process of listening to the people of God, of listening to what the Holy Spirit is saying to the people of God, there was a particular emphasis on this dimension of listening.

Listening is the first step, but it requires an open mind and an open heart, without prejudice. To whom does our particular Church have a lack of listening? how are the laity listened to? in particular young people and women? you wouldn't be surprised that among the responses many, many fruits of the synodal consultation highlighted that sometimes women do not feel well listened within the Church and that this is a challenge for today.

So, in the synodal process, at every stage, at diocesan level first, then at national level, in all the in the syntheses of synodal listening we received at the General Secretariat of the Synod, all the summaries from all your countries, collecting what you said, what was said...in all of them the question of women, of greater inclusion of women in the Church, of greater participation of women in the Church and in society, came up with great strength from all the countries. It is a call heard everywhere.

And when we tried to synthesise all these synodal consultations, these syntheses from the different countries, in this document called the document for the continental stage "*Enlarge the space of your tent*", we saw that there was this great demand to listen and above all to strengthen, to rethink the participation of women and I quote: *A key element of this process concerns the recognition of the ways in which women, especially women religious, are already at the forefront of synodal practices in some of the most challenging social situations we face. (...)*

It is often women who are closest to the poorest, the smallest, the voiceless. We heard it yesterday, we saw it in the film *Invisibles* and *in a wide range of contexts women are looking for collaborators and can teach synodality within broader ecclesial processes*. That is why this evening I want to thank you and applaud you, because we can see from the synod process that often the greatest drivers of synodality, the first actors in synodality, are actresses, you women and many others on the ground.

So I really want to say Thank you, Merci, Gracias, Grazie, Obrigada.

At this stage of the synodal process, I would like to highlight the steps that have already been taken thanks to you. The strong involvement of women's organisations in the Catholic Church. I would like to pay tribute once again to your organisation, the World Union of Women, for all its involvement, promotion and commitment to the synod process, along with many other women's organisations.

I also want to tell you that for the first time in all the commissions of the Synod secretariat, the Theology, Methodology, Spirituality and Communication Commission, there are women accompanying the synodal process and some of them are here with you. I saw Sister Anne Béatrice and I think you will hear her later on. In all the teams drafting documents, such as this one and the known working document that will soon be published at the beginning of June for the October Assembly, these documents have been worked on in a very collaborative way with women too. Women with responsibilities in synod teams in dioceses, episcopal conferences and continental bodies. Sometimes these women were coordinators or co-leaders with a man.

I would also like to point out that in the Continental Assemblies that took place recently, in February and March, there were women from every continent. They were ecclesial assemblies. And all these steps, all these experiences, have borne good fruit, and perhaps you have heard, that two weeks ago Pope Francis announced his decision, which is a great scoop: for the first time at the Assembly of the Synod of Bishops next October, and then in October 2024, there will be non-bishops among the members of the Assembly, half of them women, with the right to vote. This is the first time this has happened in the history of the Church.

I would also like to emphasise that in this listening to women, which has been undertaken in many ways during the synodal process, through all these consultations, through the surveys or research [which were carried out on the occasion of the Synod,] [we are discovering or] in any case, we have become more aware of the diversity of Catholic women. There is not only one way of being a Catholic woman, and I think that is very important. When I see you, you are together, you belong to the same union, but you also have different ways of living the faith, of expressing it, your concerns and priorities may not be the same, depending on the context of your societies and churches.

I think it is very important not to talk about "the" Catholic woman but "the" Catholic women. There's great diversity, and while there are some things in common, there is also a lot of diversity, and we shouldn't be afraid of that. The surveys and research that have been carried out have really shown that Catholic women have different experiences, depending on their life situation, their context, but the good news is that overall, the vast majority of women who have been involved in the synodal process, who have taken on responsibilities, have had the feeling that they are being listened and that they are participating in the decision-making process.

So we can see that this synod allows us to move forward on this path and also allows us, in the synodal vision in which we are all baptised and called to carry the Church's mission together, to live the Church first and foremost as a community of missionary pilgrims. It's very important, I think, the key word, to live synodality and also to live our journey as women, on the synodal journey, but also the journey of men, I think for me, [and] Pope Francis emphasised it yesterday, is to think ourselves, to think the man-woman relationship with this term of reciprocity. [That's it.]

A synodal church is a church where everyone has something to give and everyone has something to receive, and as men and women, we are called to be in this relationship of reciprocity, of mutual enrichment. [and] This is what Pope Francis said yesterday in his speech, emphasising the need to better understand live this reciprocity ever more fully in equality, the richness of reciprocity between men and women. I believe that is the great challenge, to be able to through this synodal dynamic.

This presupposes, and this is another key word, that to continue our journey as women or men in the synodal dynamic, means living reciprocity, the exchange of gifts, we can say, but also co-responsibility. That's the term. We are all co-responsible for the mission of the Church as baptised people.

This is what women are asking of the Church in asking to be more involved in the decision-making process, but they are also asking the Church, as is emphasised here in this summary document, to be their ally in advancing equality between men and women and this vision of mutual respect, collaboration and co-responsibility in all areas of society. As you no doubt know, Pope Francis recently said that in the Vatican, wherever he has appointed women to positions of responsibility, he finds that things work better. But, in fact, it's not just in the Vatican, all the surveys and studies show you that in companies, in governments, in all areas of life and even in the family, where responsibilities are shared and not just taken on by a man alone, you could say by a woman alone too, everyone is a winner. What we are discovering, and what is a major challenge for the Church,

but also for society, is that men and women, when together, are always better and that the challenge of greater participation by women in responsibilities, in decision-making processes, is not just for the benefit of women, it's for the benefit of everyone and also for the benefit of men.

We are always more fruitful for the mission when we are together.

So it is really this horizon that the Synod is highlighting, the question of the full and equal participation of women, of their inclusion, of their enhancement, in the Church and in society. So, the synodal process must enable us to continue this discernment, and in the diversity of our situations, I would like to emphasise, because you represent also the diversity of the continents, how much in the continental assemblies, we have seen this convergence of a demand for greater involvement of women in governance, decision-making processes, missions and ministries. I must say though there are also local realities, and different emphases in each continent. In Asia for example there are many women religious, but that they are not always well recognised or taken into account; in Africa there is a great demand to have specific structures, so that women are really listened to, participating; in Latin America the question of ministries for women is underlined and for example in certain other continents such as the Middle East, the question of the diaconate for women is also underlined, but this is not the case everywhere.

So I invite you to take part in this ongoing process of discernment and to contribute your charisms and gifts to the synodal Church, which needs and relies on women and all the people of God to move forward together.

Thank you very much for your time.