



Pedro Aguado's talk. Oaxaca. JUL 2019



CHALLENGES OF THE PIOUS SCHOOLS SYNOD

For a reflection with the participants in the General Assembly of the Piarist Youth.

I'll start by sharing with you a conviction: the Youth's Piarist Synod has two risks: thinking that it is a synod for the young people only, and the second one is to think that it is only an event.

I share with you a blessed memory from the Synod in Rome. I was drinking coffee during one of the breaks. Pope Francis said to a group that was sharing with him: "I want a Synod focused on young people, faith and vocational discernment. I want a Synod for the youth, so they feel Christ's provocation to opt for life."

1. The Synod's experience

Pope Francis decided that it was necessary to call a Synod of Youth because he saw that it was time. The church needs young men and women to do a pulse check on their lives, their faith, and thus promote their commitment with the Church strongly.

The process of the Piarist Synod in the Order has been powerful. Many have congratulated us. Although many people have done similar processes in the past, it seems that they would have stopped there. However, what surprises us is that we have started a new process and we work on it, side by side, with the young people. It is not enough to have gone through one before; we want

to open a new time, start a new way of working with young people.

The Climate and Style of the Synod. The synod came in a difficult time for the church. In the October's assembly, we saw the Church's great diversity in those who were present: Bishops, experts, youth, etc. There were also a lot of religious orders

We saw great diversity within the Church. Differences of opinions, the differences in postures, coming from all corners of the world. With everyone, there was an environment of listening. Of course, there was a time limitation, except when Pope Francis was sharing... the environment was full of freshness, friendliness and welcome.

SOME KEYS THAT MARKED LINE AND DIRECTION IN THE SYNOD:

- a) Synodality. A Church that listens and in which every person counts.
- b) A church that goes forth. We have had enough of shepherds; we have to be a church of fishermen; a church that evangelizes more, able to go out and search for those who are further away.
- c) Accompaniment and empathic listening. It is a complicated matter. Only when young people know they are being listened to will then allow others to accompany them. To accompany requires the knowledge of art.
- d) A pastoral of complete processes. We want a complete pastoral starting when the person is born until the last day of their lives – nothing to do with a pastoral of events only.
- e) Martyrs. A young man from Syria was sharing with me what it means to be the friend of a martyr. A bomb exploded when he and his friends were coming out of church; he was the only one to save his life by a couple of seconds. He said to me: "I am the friend of various saints: My friends who were killed that day."
- f) The Immigrants. This is the great subject of the world's poor. They are everywhere: in the Mediterranean, which is one of the biggest common pits in the world, but also in Brazil or Chile, where Venezuelan migrants refuge; in Tijuana, where thousands await behind the border. These are dramas that resonate in our consciences.
- g) Discernment: How do I discern, how to find God's will? To Discern is not only to make de-

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- isions. It is to find, honestly, what does God want from me? And if you find it, and your spirit does not wither, you do not stay still paralyzed by fear. This is an exigent process, because, just as collective discernment, it is not about winning votes by imposing my opinion but being attentive and listen to the Spirit. Thus, discerning in life requires a lot of prayers.
- h) The young man in his reality: How can the young man find a way that is connected with life?
 - i) Integral Education from the Gospel. We have talked extensively about this Piarist subject. Education in all aspects of the person, since the keys in the Gospel.
 - j) The Key to vocational discernment, which I will talk about below.

All these significant concerns came out in the Final Document, inspired by the icon of the Gospel of Emmaus, with the meeting of the two disciples with Jesus Christ. I think that it is worth to know said document because it reflects the fruit of the work of the interesting and diverse group of people who met in the Synodal Assembly this past October in Rome. Also, because said work was based on all the Church's contributions. Yesterday you were working on it through the workshops, in which by the way, "you were kind of noisy." Our Piarist Synod wants to be inspired by this document, as well as by the Apostolic Exhortation, through this synodal process and to continue it.

2) Keys from which we can understand the Synod and receive it.

- a) It is not an event, but we want to open a process. The more you are enriched with this assembly, the better. The issue is how we are going to do among us all a Pious Schools that are more capable of offering the best we have: nothing more and nothing less than Jesus Christ himself. Therefore, I show you a treasure of the archive. Father General Tomek in 1948 presented a project called CALASANCTIAN CATHOLIC ACTION, with the subtitle "Epiphany of Youth." It is, without a doubt, a precursor project of the Calasanz Movement. We are opening a process with the Synod that, nevertheless, is inserted in the DNA of the Pious Schools.,
- b) It is not a reflection but a new way of walking. Sinodality implies a new way of doing things.
- c) It is not just another suggestion, but a clear commitment to building the Pious Schools more Calasanzian, more conveners, missionary, but also, participative.
- d) It is not a simple ideal horizon, but a direction in which to build. Look: if we can easily fulfill our ideals, then, they are not high ideals. Therefore, there is something that we have reduced, and for this reason, they are small.
- e) There is a church to transform, Pious Schools to continue building, a Calasanzian dream to make a reality, a vocation (yours, dear young person) to discover and a life to live.

3) Some of the strongest challenges that the Synod proposes to the Pious Schools:

Here is the center of what they asked me to do in this talk

- » Understand that the Synod challenges us. Unfortunately, surely there are Piarists and members of the Fraternities who have not read the synodal documents. Others who have read them, have worked on them thoroughly and have been passionate about them. We are facing a challenge that cannot leave us the same as carriers that we are of the Charism of the Holy Founder.

- » It is a challenge for our way of listening. Here there are companions and companions ... and we all are. Religious Piarists, fraternal brothers, youth, etc., we are all people of listening and in need of listening. When we feel welcomed and heard, the strength of the search is mobilized in us. The companion who knows how to listen, knows perfectly that the best advice is found by the person when reaching out to God.
- » Development of complete pastoral processes, alongside the Calasanz Movement. However, we also want to revitalize our parishes too; We want them to develop their full potential.
- » To fight against all types of abuse. Against all ways of thinking that can be above other people, even above civil laws.
- » Strengthen commitment and social participation. Yesterday a secretary from one of the groups said: In my group, we want to change the world. –I thought to myself: that is good. That is why we are here, precisely, to change the world.
- » Beware of complacency: thinking that we have already done enough. This can happen to us with the Synod of Youth. To think that we have made a grand tour of two years and that is enough. We cannot afford this.
- » Find God in young people. Young people are a theological place. Never forget that Calasanz was a trained priest with a lot of theological formation, and yet, the children and the poor youth of Rome made him a Piarist. They were to Calasanz the burning bush where he found God.
- » What does synodality mean for the Pious Schools? We will experience having four young people come to the General Chapter, and this will be a sign of the process of the joint path that is already open.
- » Vocational qualification of Youth Ministry. It is the central commitment and objective of youth ministry; Helping the young person to discover Christ and to follow Him. If not so, our ministry does not fulfill its mission.
- » Role of Women. Considering how women are taken into account in teams, in leadership, in

decision making and how women are on an equal footing.

- » Proposals we can make as Piarists to help young people in the processes of vocational discernment.

The vocation is discerned in the places where God is. These places are deep prayer, life in the community, shared with those who follow Jesus and in the experience of discovering God in the poor, in those who need me.

Look, while at the Youth Synod Assembly, three measures were approved by vote:

- Opening experiences of shared fraternal life. I tell the communities: Do you invite young people to your home and to come and see the center of your life? Share a meal, or brief moments with them, but also have them share with you the center of your life: Christ.
- Substantial and significant apostolic proposals. We have to invite the youth to these proposals, but also ask each young person who participates about what he has borne internally.
- Experiences of prayer and consistent spirituality. That is, a retreat, spiritual exercises, a strong experience of community life and prayer, etc.

- The initial formation of the Piarist youth. How to train the future Piarists to respond to what the world and the Church need? There are almost 600 young Piarists in formation. This is an apostolic bomb ... The goal of these young men is to be a new Calasanz, giving themselves to children and young people.

4. What we can and should build together (proposed by the Holy Father, Pope Francis):

I invite you to read in the Apostolic Exhortation, *Christus Vivit*, numbers 111 to 129. There are three fundamental truths that one must know how to proclaim:

- » God loves you, and he is concerned about you (112)
- » Christ saves you (118)
- » Christ is alive, and He is present to fill our lives with grace (124)

These three points can help us understand that God counts on you and that he is committed to you. What does it mean that Christ died for you? Let us wonder how the Cross changes your life, with Jesus' death and his Resurrection ... Above all, what does it mean that He is alive? This must be lived passionately. "You CANNOT offer to others anything less than Jesus Christ himself."

Four options to walk from:

- I ask young people who decide to be Piarists, what do you want to live? What do you dream of? That is why you must ask others about their dreams. And our obligation is to help them find those dreams.
- To grow, to live and to experience. Help young people to live authentic processes. The big question is; What do you want to dedicate your life to? Asking others what they are going to study is just a question out of curiosity.
- Committed life. Calasanz asks Glicerio Landriani, the first young man who wanted to live as a Piarist: What lives within your heart? So Calasanz proposes him to live with authenticity and passion the call that this restless young man had received.
- The missionary proposal. We propose something big. The hundredfold – as Jesus Christ says in the Gospel – with persecutions ... That is: with pain and sufferings, with misunderstandings. But a hundredfold and also eternal life.

The proposal that we cannot stop making and that



you cannot leave unanswered: vocation and discernment. In the number 283 of *Christus Vivit*, it is said: A particular form of discernment involves the effort to discover our own vocation. Since this is a very personal decision that others cannot make for us, it requires a certain degree of solitude and silence. “The Lord speaks to us in a variety of ways, at work, through others, and at every moment. Yet we simply cannot do without the silence of prolonged prayer, which enables us better to perceive God’s language, to interpret the real meaning of the inspirations we believe we have received, to calm our anxieties and to see the whole of our existence afresh in his own light.”

And then again, on number 287: To discern our personal vocation, we have to realize that it is a calling from a friend, who is Jesus. When we give something to our friends, we give them the best we have. It will not necessarily be what is most expensive or hard to obtain, but what we know will make them happy. Friends are so sensitive to this that they can already imagine the smile on their friend’s face when he or she opens that gift. This sort of discernment that takes place among friends is what I suggest you take as a model for trying to discover God’s will for your lives.

The great questions that the Pope asks here are the questions that help us to succeed in life. I tell you that in addition to accompanying a young person, we must make risky proposals. We need young people to make crazy proposals as Calasanz made himself. When I present this to you, I do not do it for myself; I do it for the children and young people who need Piarists.

And when a young man shares that God may be calling him to become a Piarist, explain clearly that in the Gospel, there is no message of “wait until you are older.” That is not in the Gospel. When a young man has this call in his heart, en-

courage him to believe in himself, and make the best of him. There is nothing more stupid than a doubting heart, doubtful of God’s call to happiness. Where in the Gospel is it written: “Yes, wait to finish your career and everything else and when it is clear, then decide?” We must tell them the words of Christ: “Whoever leaves everything for me will receive a hundredfold, with persecutions, and then eternal life.”

5. What does the Order need and hope from you?

- a) Authenticity: that you live knowing what you feel and act accordingly.
- b) Requirement. Do not allow yourselves to be calm. I don’t want Piarists who have no time for young people. We need all of us who are part of the Piarist history to demand this of us.
- c) The Pious Schools are not yet finished being built. The Saint died with the Pious Schools being attacked and touched to death. In his letter communicating to the Piarists the reduction of the Order, he said: “But I ask you, continue working for the children, trust in God, stay united and joyful.” So what happened? That the Piarists paid attention to him, and here we are. Help us and let us make the Pious Schools better. However, let us remember that the goal is not the Pious Schools; it is the Kingdom of God.
- d) We have always been outnumbered. There have always been less in number to finish all tasks. Money has always been lacking. However, that is not why the projects and the Order that we have today have stopped. We must believe in the projects we have. Calasanz opened Piarist houses every 13 months, without means, without people, without technology.
- e) Read chapter 1 of the Constitutions. He says: “The Pious Schools are the work of God, and of

the fortunate boldness and tenacious patience of San José Calasanz. Boldness and determination. Strong options and thorough work. When we decided to go to Burkina Faso, we did not know how to build a School. But recently, an Italian family offered the money for it. We need “fortunate boldness “ and at the same time, the tenacious patience of those who know how to sustain processes.

6. And what do you need and expect from the Order, from the Piarists:

What you expect from the Order matches what the Piarists need from you.

- a) Authenticity. May we help you to seek and live like this, according to God’s plan.
- b) Questions, demands, proposals. We hope to offer you crazy proposals: why don’t you come to Mozambique for two years? Why don’t you seriously think about a religious vocation? What if you have a companion for your apostolic and precious soul but in need of order and clarity? Would you become a pastoralist and train for two years in Theology?
- c) Enthusiasm. I repeat: children and young people need your enthusiasm, not us, the Piarists. This is not a request for us but for the world that needs them.
- d) To believe in the projects we promote.
- e) People with fortunate boldness and tenacious patience.

7. I finish by reminding you of the only offer you need ...

The only offer you need, the only response you can expect, the only companion that will not fail you, the only person who deserves your YES wholeheartedly. Christ lives and loves you and wants you alive!

Therefore, I celebrate the title: Christ loves you, and he wants you alive.

What we expect and offer is the same as what Calasanz did. He said that the only answer is Christ,

“The Pious Schools are the work of God, and of the fortunate boldness and tenacious patience of San José Calasanz. Boldness and determination. Strong options and thorough work”

the only companion and the only person who deserves all our Yes is Christ. He lives and loves you, and he wants you alive! Thank you.

QUESTIONS:

Question No 1: Thank you because you helped us understand the Synod. Some young people say they feel part of the Church with the Pious Schools but not so much with the Local Church. How do we bring young people to the local Church? Why does it seem that young people identify with the Pious Schools and not with the Church?

Fr. General: If the latter is so, we are doing something wrong. We must work hard so that young people come to Christ and live Him in the Church. I like to say that a young man who lives his faith in the Christian Piarist Community has his “baptismal font” in it. But our Piarist Christian communities must be clearly inserted in the local Church. The ecclesiality is a challenge of communion.

Our challenge is to build a coherent and continuous Christian process. And connect it in each place with the Church, which in each place lives different situations. Therefore, these links will have to be made in the manner and circumstances that best fit in each place.

There are parishes that have no alternatives or dioceses that do not see decent community outlets

to offer their youth. There we can have a significant role to play. Think of how many people come to us because they find life in our places.

We have to connect with the Church, but we must know that we are Church and that we build Church.

Question No 2: Young people identify with values and social action, not so much with spirituality. What was said at the Synod to facilitate that step?

Fr. General: How to discover that there is something that sustains that force. There may be difficulties because the ecclesial context does not help. But many times, this happens because the companions do not help these good and solidary young people to go deeper.

Faith brings conviction and stability. What happens when the young man runs out of time, and goodwill? The leap to faith takes place if, with the experience of social action, we help to bring them closer to the faith, which is the food and what helps in the growth of the solidary heart.

How do we apply Mt 25 in helping others understand that he who puts the robe on the poor puts it on Christ? In the Gospel, Jesus calls to his side those who have dressed the naked, of course. However, our mission is to help discover the person of Christ in the naked ones.

Question No 3: Social reality has changed. Bringing young people to the Church has also changed. How do we, young people, talk to the “Piarists who have not made that change” to get closer and become involved?

Fr. General: How can this happen? I would recommend you tell them to read John 3 and the discussion with Nicodemus. That man, with his square mentality, hears from Jesus: - “You have to be born again.” And Nicodemus finally understood.

My advice is this: keep working for the children. Do not lose joy. Work for what you have to work. Do not argue. Stay together with the Community ... Ask that Piarist to come, to celebrate Mass ... Moreover, his heart will change, little by little.

Slowly, you will see small holes in the wall. The Holy Spirit is immensely capable of breaking walls.

And at the same time, you should know that it is a long process. Maybe there are projects that take a little longer to come to fruition. There is no Piarist who does not believe in someone who works for the children. Step by step.

Question No. 4: How do you live in the Universal Church putting Christ at the center and the emphasis that the Synod makes in this line taken up strongly by Pope Francis?

The Pope writes to all the people of God. He asks everyone in a profound renewal that Christ is here alive with us. Being in the environment of the Universal Church, you perceive many things. You see that some walk more and others less. I tell you that the process of hosting a Synod takes years.

To give you an example: Pope Francis, one day after having been elected, proposed a Church that goes forth. Our Order, six months ago, raised the process of Pious Schools Going Forth and the Kikonka generation is already underway. This process will bear missionary fruits not now but within a while.

In the Synod, we heard the conviction that together, young and old, we look for Christ who lives forever. It is not about young people defining who Christ is. Christ is and always has been.

The Calasanz Movement will transform the way of being Church and being Pious Schools, but it takes time. You have to stay on course and keep working.

Goya’s painting is an icon representative of standing firm in the processes. It is Calasanz’s last communion with children. At 90 years old, he believed in being present with the children. He believed in opening this process.