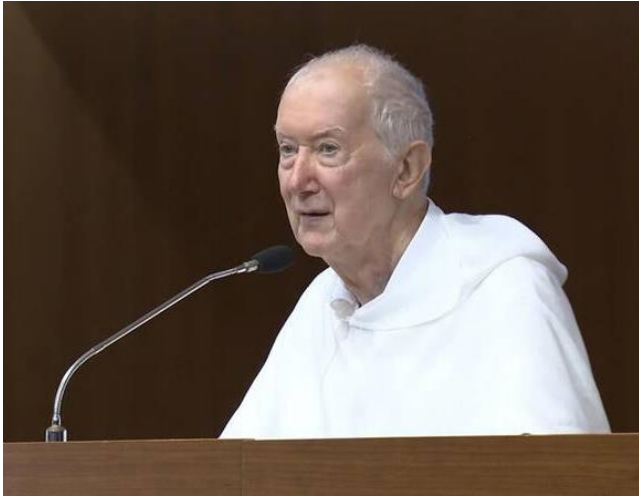


An excellent article in the Jesuit magazine 'America' about the three-day Retreat - in the week before the Synod started - preached at the invitation of Pope Francis by the English Dominican, Timothy Radcliffe to all the participants.

Thomas Reece SJ - Father Timothy Radcliffe showed at the synod: It takes a Dominican preacher to explain a Jesuit pope.



Those familiar with Catholic Church history know that through the centuries there have been many disputes between Jesuits and Dominicans, two of the largest religious orders in the church. On the other hand, when the Jesuits are in real trouble, they know they can turn to the Dominicans for help. Thus, when the Jesuit superior general Lorenzo Ricci died in Castel Sant'Angelo in 1775 after being imprisoned by Pope Clement XIII, it was the master of the Order of Preachers who was willing to preside at his funeral when no one else in Rome wanted anything to do with the Jesuits. Dominican masters have presided at the funerals of Jesuit generals ever since.

As a result, it was fitting that Francis, the Jesuit pope, chose a Dominican, **Timothy Radcliffe**, to set the tone for his Synod on Synodality, which has been under attack in some corners of the church. Before the participants gathered in the Vatican for the synod, they took time for a three-day retreat led by the Dominican preacher, **who in a series of six talks laid out a spiritual and theological vision for the synod.**

Radcliffe did not beat around the bush but in his first talk acknowledged the divisions in the church. *"We are gathered here because we are not united in heart and mind,"* he said. *"The vast majority of people who have taken part in the synodal process have been surprised by joy. For many, it is the first time that the Church has invited them to speak of their faith and hope. But some of us are afraid of this journey and of what lies ahead. Some hope that the Church will be dramatically changed, that we shall take radical decisions, for example about the role of women in the Church. Others are afraid of exactly these same changes and fear that they will only lead to division, even schism."*

He noted that even the disciples of Jesus misunderstood each other and quarrelled. *"Do not be afraid,"* he said, quoting St. John. *"Perfect love casts out fear."* At the same time, he urged those at the retreat to *"always be sensitive to the fears of others, especially those with whom we disagree."* - *"We may be divided by different hopes,"* he acknowledged. *"But if we listen to the Lord and to each other, seeking to understand his will for the Church and the world, we shall be united in a hope that transcends our disagreements."*

In his second talk, Radcliffe spoke about the church as home but admitted, *"different understandings of the Church as home tear us apart today."* - *"For some, it is defined by its ancient traditions and devotions, its inherited structures and language, the Church we have grown up with and love. It gives us a clear Christian identity. For others, the present Church does not seem to be a safe home. It is experienced as exclusive, marginalizing many people: women, the divorced and remarried. For some it is too Western, too Eurocentric."*

He said that gay people and people in polygamous marriages *"long for a renewed Church in which they will feel fully at home, recognized, affirmed and safe."*

He ended his second meditation by quoting Carlo Carretto (1910–1988), a Little Brother of Charles de Foucauld:

How much I must criticize you, my church, and yet how much I love you! You have made me suffer more than anyone, and yet I owe more to you than to anyone. I should like to see you destroyed, and yet I need your presence. You have given me much scandal, and yet you alone have made me understand your holiness. ... Countless times, I have felt like slamming the door of my soul in your face — and yet, every night, I have prayed that I might die in your sure arms!

No, I cannot be free of you, for I am one with you, even if not completely you. Then too - where would I go? To build another church? But I could not build one without the same defects, for they are my defects.

Granted the problems and divisions facing the church, what will a successful synod look like? *“This Synod will be fruitful if it leads us into a deeper friendship with the Lord and with each other,”* asserted Radcliffe.

He acknowledged that this is a hard sale. *“The foundation of all that we shall do in this Synod should be the friendships we create. It does not look like much. It will not make headlines in the media. They came all the way to Rome to make friendships! What a waste!”* These friendships are formed by being *“truthful about our doubts and questions with each other; the questions to which we have no clear answers,”* he continued.

Radcliffe quoted Graham Greene’s Monsignor Quixote, a Spanish Catholic priest who shared his doubts with a communist mayor. The priest says: *“It is odd how sharing a sense of doubt can bring people together perhaps even more than sharing a faith. The believer will fight another believer over a shade of difference; the doubter fights only with himself.”* *“Friendship flourishes when we dare to share our doubts and seek the truth together,”* concluded Radcliffe. But to do this, we must listen.

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Father Radcliffe said. “But to do this, we must listen.”**

Listening and conversation in the Spirit are central to the synodal process. Radcliffe noted that the religious orders have something to teach the church about the art of conversation. *“St. Benedict teaches us to seek consensus; St. Dominic to love debate, St. Catherine of Siena to delight in conversation, and St. Ignatius of Loyola, the art of discernment. St. Philip Neri, the role of laughter.”*

“Conversation needs an imaginative leap into the experience of the other person,” explained Radcliffe. *“To see with their eyes and hear with their ears. We need to get inside their skin. From what experiences do their words spring? What pain or hope do they carry? What journey are they on?”* This conversation leads to understanding, respect and love.

Radcliffe countered those who see conversation as a threat to authority. *“Authority is multiple and mutually enhancing,”* he asserted. *“There need be no competition, as if the laity can only have more authority if the bishops have less.”*

He told the retreatants that authority comes from beauty, goodness and truth. But *“without truth, beauty can be vacuous,”* he said. *“Without goodness, beauty can deceive. Goodness without truth collapses into sentimentality. Truth without goodness leads to the Inquisition.”*

A prophet, he asserted, must have a love of truth but also compassion for those for whom that truth is eclipsed.

Finally, Radcliffe noted that *“our society is filled with burning rage,”* which springs from fear. But we need not be afraid because the Lord promised, *“When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth.”* But Radcliffe is not naïve. He recognizes the problems in the church (sex abuse and corruption) and in the world.

“We are careening toward an ecological catastrophe, but our political leaders mostly pretend that nothing is happening,” he reported. *“Our world is crucified by poverty and violence, but the wealthy countries do not want to see the millions of our brothers and sisters who suffer and look for a home.”*

Being afraid leads to a fear of losing control, *“which is why the Synod is feared by many,”* said Radcliffe. But *“being led by the Spirit into all truth means letting go of the present, trusting that the Spirit will beget new institutions, new forms of Christian living, new ministries.”* Like a mother bird, he said, *“The Holy Spirit sometimes kicks us out of the nest and bids us fly! We flap in panic but fly we will!”*

Radcliffe concluded: *“If we let ourselves be guided by the Spirit of truth, we shall doubtless argue. It will sometimes be painful. There will be truths we would rather not face. But we shall be led a little deeper into the mystery of divine love and we shall know such joy that people will be envious of us for being here and will long to attend the next session of the Synod!”*

Radcliffe the Dominican did very well in explaining Francis the Jesuit.