

POPE FRANCIS

BELOVED AMAZONIA

*The Apostolic Exhortation
and Other Documents
from the Pan-Amazon Synod*

ORBIS  BOOKS
Maryknoll, New York 10545

GREETING OF HIS HOLINESS POPE FRANCIS

Vatican Basilica—New Synod Hall

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Sisters and Brothers, Good morning!

Welcome to all and thank you for your preparatory work: everyone has worked so hard, from that moment in Puerto Maldonado¹ until today. Thank you very much.

The Synod . . . I will speak in Spanish, it is better. . . . The Synod for the Amazon, we might say that it covers four dimensions: the pastoral dimension, the cultural dimension, the social dimension, and the ecological dimension. The first, the pastoral dimension, is the essential one, the one that encompasses everything. Let us address it with a Christian heart and look at the reality of the Amazon with the eyes of disciples in order to comprehend it and interpret it with the eyes of disciples, because there are no neutral hermeneutics, aseptic hermeneutics; they are always conditioned by a prior option; our prior option is that of disciples. And the eyes of missionaries, because the love that the Holy Spirit has placed in us urges us to proclaim Jesus Christ; a proclamation—as we all know—that is not to be confused with proselytism. Let us try to face the reality of the Amazon with this pastoral heart, with the eyes of disciples and of missionaries, because that is what impels us to proclaim the Lord. And let us also approach the Amazonian peoples on tip-toe, respecting their history, their cultures, their good way of living in the etymological sense of the word, not in the social sense that we often attribute to them, because peoples have a proper identity, all peoples have their wisdom, a self-awareness;

¹ MEETING WITH INDIGENOUS PEOPLE OF AMAZONIA, Puerto Maldonado, Peru, 15–22 January 2018.

peoples have a way of feeling, a way of seeing reality, a history, a hermeneutic, and they tend to be protagonists of their history with these matters, with these qualities. And as outsiders we consider ideological colonizations that destroy or diminish the characteristics of the peoples. Ideological colonization is very widespread. And without any entrepreneurial apprehension, we consider offering them prepackaged programs in order to “discipline” the Amazonian peoples, to discipline their history, their culture; or this concern to “domesticate” the indigenous peoples. When the Church has forgotten this, that is, the way she should approach a people, she has not been inculturated; she has actually come to disdain certain peoples. And how many failures we regret today. Let us think of [Roberto] de Nobile in India, of [Matteo] Ricci in China, and so many others. The “homogenizing” and “homogenative” centralism has not allowed the peoples’ authenticity to emerge.

Ideologies are a dangerous weapon; we always have the tendency to latch on to an ideology in order to interpret a people. Ideologies are reductive and lead us to exaggeration in our claim to comprehend intellectually, but without accepting, comprehending without admiring, comprehending without assimilating. So reality is understood in categories, and the more common ones are the categories of *-isms*. Thus, when we have to approach the reality of a certain indigenous people, we speak of indigenisms, and when we wish to propose a way to a better life, we do not ask them about it; we talk about developmentalism. These *-isms* reformulate life starting from the illuminated and the illuminist laboratory.

They are slogans that are taking root, and they set the approach to indigenous peoples. In our country, a slogan—“civility and barbarity”—served to divide, to destroy, and it reached its climax toward the end of the 1980s, destroying most of the indigenous peoples, because they were “barbarians,” and “civility” came from the other side. It is the contempt for peoples—and I take this experience from my land; this “civility and barbarity,” which served to destroy peoples, still continues today in my homeland, with offensive words, and so we speak

of second-tier forms of civility, those that come from barbarity; and today there are the *bolitas*, *los paraguayanos*, *los paraguas*, *los cabecitas negras*, always this distancing from the reality of a people, qualifying them and holding them at a distance. This is the experience in my country.

And then contempt. Yesterday I was very displeased to hear—in here—a sarcastic comment about that pious man who brought offerings with a feathered headdress. Tell me: what difference is there between wearing a feathered headdress and the tricorne hat worn by some officials of our dicasteries? So we run the risk of simply proposing pragmatic measures, when, on the contrary, a contemplation of the peoples is required, a capacity for admiration that leads to thinking in a paradigmatic way. If someone comes with pragmatic intentions, pray the “I am a sinner,” so that you may convert and open your heart toward a paradigmatic perspective that springs from the reality of the peoples.

We did not come here to invent social development programs or museum-type cultural preservation, or for pastoral actions with the same non-contemplative manner by which actions of the opposite kind are moving forward: deforestation, uniformizing, exploitation. They also create programs that do not respect the poetry—if I may say so—the reality of the peoples, which is sovereign. We must also guard against worldliness in how we solicit points of view, changes in organization. Worldliness always seeps in and distances us from the poetry of the peoples.

We have come here to contemplate, to comprehend, to serve the peoples. And we do so by taking a synodal path; we do so as a synod, not at round tables, not in conferences and further discussions: we do so as a synod, because a synod is not a parliament; it is not a parlor; it is not demonstrating who has more power in the media and who has more power on the web, in order to impose some idea or some plan. This would amount to a congregationalist Church, if we mean taking polls to find out who has the majority. Or a sensationalist Church so far off, so distant from our Blessed Mother, the Catholic Church, or as St. Ignatius loved to say: “Our Blessed Mother the hierarchical

Church.” Synod means walking together under the inspiration and guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the primary actor of the synod. Please let us not drive him from the hall. Consultations have taken place; it has been discussed in the Episcopal Conferences, in the Pre-Synod Council; the *Instrumentum laboris* has been developed, which as you know is a martyr text, destined to be destroyed, because it is a point of departure for what the Spirit will do within us. And now let us walk under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Now we must allow the Holy Spirit to express himself in this Assembly, to express himself among us, to express himself with us, through us, to express himself “despite” us, despite our resistance, which is normal, because thus is the life of a Christian.

Therefore, what will our work be here, in order to ensure that this presence of the Holy Spirit may be fruitful? First and foremost, pray. Sisters and brothers, I ask you to pray, a great deal. Reflect, dialogue, listen with humility, knowing that I do not know everything. And speak with courage, with *parrhesia*, even if I am embarrassed to do so, to say what I feel, to discern, and all this in here, safeguarding the fraternity that must exist herein, in order to favor this approach of reflection, prayer, discernment, of listening with humility, and speaking out with courage. After four interventions we shall have four minutes of silence. Someone said: “It is risky, Father, because they will fall asleep.” During the Synod on Young People, where we did the same thing, instead the opposite happened: they tended to fall asleep during the interventions—at least, during some—and woke up during the silence.

Lastly, being in synod means being encouraged to enter a process. It does not mean occupying space in the hall but to enter a process. And ecclesial processes have a need: they must be protected, cared for like a baby, supported at the beginning, cared for delicately. They need the warmth of the community; they need the warmth of Mother Church. This is how an ecclesial process grows. It is important to foster the attitude of respect, the fraternal atmosphere, the air of intimacy. It does not mean referring everything, as it comes. For it is not a mat-

ter of respect for those whom we must inform about a secret more proper to Lodges than to the ecclesial community, but of sensitivity and prudence in the communication that we must have with the outside. And this need to communicate to the many people outside who want to know, to our many brothers and sisters, journalists, who have the vocation to serve so that it may be broadcast, and to help them in this, press services, briefings, and so on will be provided.

But a process such as a synod can be somewhat ruined if, when I exit the hall, I can say what I think, voice my opinion. And then there will be that feature that I saw at several synods: that of the “inside synod” and the “outside synod.” The inside synod, which follows the journey of Mother Church, the synod of attention to processes; and the outside synod, which, because information given with levity, communicated with imprudence, leads those who have the duty to inform, to misinform.

Thus, thank you for what you are doing. Thank you because you prayed for one another, and take courage. And, please, let us not lose our sense of humor. Thank you.