Presentation of the post-synodal apostolic exhortation CHRISTUS VIVIT of Pope Francis

A call to live with Christ in friendship

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INTRODUCTION

1. "Christ is alive! He is our hope, and in a wonderful way he brings youth to our world. The very first words, then, that I would like to say to every young Christian, are these: Christ is alive and he wants you to be alive!"

Thus begins the post-synodal apostolic exhortation of the Holy Father, *Christus vivit,* dedicated to young people and to the entire people of God. This text, released publicly on April 2, 2019—five months after the end of the synod of Bishops on "Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment" which took place in Rome last October—is the fourth exhortation of this pontificate. It comes after *Evangelii Gaudium (*The Joy of the Gospel), *Amoris Laetitia* (The Joy of Love) and *Gaudete et Exsultate* (Rejoice and Be Glad). Originally written in Spanish in a very personal style, one can clearly recognize the pen of Pope Francis. At the same time this magisterial text is also the result of a whole synodal process.

In the introduction, the Holy Father tells us that he was "inspired by the wealth of reflections and conversations that emerged from last year's synod." So the text quotes extensively from the final document of the synod (FD) as well as from the final document of the pre-synod. But if this Letter particularly targets young people between 16 and 29, it is also addressed more broadly to all baptized at this particular time, one marked by the crisis of sexual abuse and abuse of authority. And it is delivered to all as a roadmap for a church that strongly needs to be renewed and reformed. I encourage you to enter step by step into this nine-chapter post-synodal exhortation, a work that can be considered a true treatise on spiritual and pastoral life.

CHAPTERS 1 & 2

This exhortation **starts with a biblical journey** that allows us to meditate on **"What does the word of God have to say about young people?"** as the title of **Chapter 1** indicates. Through different figures from the Old Testament—Joseph, Gideon, Samuel, David, Solomon—and the New Testament then followed in **Chapter 2 by a reflection on "Jesus ever young"** Pope Francis leads us to a meditation on the youth of the church called to always renew itself. Because youth is an attitude of the heart: "Youth is more than simply a period of time; it is a state of mind" (34), the church is called to let herself be renewed by rediscovering the essential, the impulse of first love.

"The church is young when she is herself, when she receives ever anew the strength born of God's word, the Eucharist, and the daily presence of Christ and the power of his Spirit in our lives. The church is young when she shows herself capable of constantly returning to her source" (35). For this reason, the church must be attentive to the signs of the times that she can read eminently when she is "humbly acknowledging that some things concretely need to change, and if that is to happen, she needs to appreciate the vision but also the criticisms of young people" (39).

Thus, to be a living church in today's world and to respond to a strong demand from young people denouncing the too many discriminations against women in society and in the church, the church must overcome its fears and "can react by being attentive to the legitimate claims of those women who seek greater justice and equality" (42). And the pope concludes this chapter with a meditation

with whom we can get through everything, the Friend who makes everyone live and makes everyone more alive. Thus in 129:

> If in your heart you can learn to appreciate the beauty of this message, if you are willing to encounter the Lord, if you are willing to let him love you and save you, if you can make friends with him and start to talk to him, the living Christ, about the realities of your life, then you will have a profound experience capable of sustaining your entire Christian life. You will also be able to share that experience with other young people.

Finally, in a Trinitarian dynamic, this chapter concludes with an invitation to constantly invoke the "Spirit of life" as "the source of youth at its best." Here is quoted a beautiful passage from Pedro Arrupe in *Enamórate*.

CHAPTER 5

Then comes the central **Chapter 5** entitled **"Paths of Youth"** in which it is strongly affirmed that "youth is a gift of God" because "God is the giver of youth and he is at work in the life of each young person. Youth is a blessed time for the young and a grace for the church and for the world. It is joy, a song of hope and a blessing (135). There is following a beautiful anthropological reflection on what is fundamentally this particular period of life : *A time of dreams and decisions*. The young person is the one who walks inhabited by a promise of life. The challenge for him or her is to find concrete joy and a full life by daring to make the right choices. And here Pope Francis indicates clearly the way to follow: "Jesus is the way: welcome him into your 'boat' and put out into the deep! He is the Lord! He changes the way we see life. Faith in Jesus leads to greater hope, to a certainty based not on our qualities and skills, but on the word of God, on the invitation that comes from him. "Put out into the deep. Go out of yourselves" (141).

In a very existential approach that starts from the reality of young people, Pope Francis relies on this essential dimension of their life that is friendship. In this very powerful part entitled "*In friendship with Christ*" he presents this relationship as "stable, firm and faithful" and explains the way of prayer both as a challenge and an adventure, choosing words that are fully meaningful. In the way the Holy Father reasons, we can recognize the pedagogy of the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius of Loyola. Thus Pope Francis proposes to live one's youth as an interior experience of growth to bear more fruit by daring to let oneself be fully reached by Christ who wants for each young person a greater life that allows him or her to be more and to give him or herself to others. In paragraphs 156 - 162 on growth and maturation, the pope quotes one of his reference theologians Romano Guardini and also gives a touching personal testimony: "At every moment in life, we can renew our youthfulness. When I began my ministry as pope, the Lord broadened my horizons and granted me renewed youth" (160).

Finally, this long central chapter ends by evoking the community and social dimension of following Christ, with a section called "*Paths of Fraternity*" and another called "*Young and committed*." The Pope seeks to open the dimension of social and political commitment: "I ask young people to go beyond their small groups and to build" social friendship, where everyone works for the common good" (169. He emphasizes how "social commitment is a specific feature of today's young people" (170) even if it takes different forms than those of previous generations. In the continuation of his many speeches to young people, especially at World Youth Day, Pope Francis encourages young people to commit themselves to building a better world, calling them to be "protagonists of change" and "courageous missionaries," that is, "Lovers of Christ, … called to witness to the Gospel everywhere, through their own lives."

"The Gospel is for everyone, not just for some" (177, he says). And he concludes with this key message: 'Young friends, don't wait until tomorrow to contribute your energy, your audacity and

your creativity to changing our world. Your youth is not an "in-between time." "You are the *now* of God, and he wants you to bear fruit (178)."

CHAPTER 6

Chapter 6, entitled **"Young people with roots,"** gives a light at the opposite of our current world which often values instantaneity and appearance through a cult of youth and a superficial frame of life. The pope tries to "propose another way, one born of freedom, enthusiasm, creativity and new horizons, while at the same time cultivating the roots that nourish and sustain us" (184). It is a path that calls us to nourish and care for our roots of culture and history. And accordingly he takes up and deploys one of his favorite themes: the essential and fruitful encounter between the young and the elderly.

Thus Pope Francis recommends that young people build relationships with the elderly people and listen to them in order to discover the past. He again quotes Joel's prophecy: *"I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. Then your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will have visions and your old men will have dreams"* (Jl. 3:1) which he had already mentioned in his opening speech at the pre-synod and recalled at the beginning of the synod. At the same time he asks the elders to be "memory keepers." The elders dream and the young people have visions, and if the two complement each other in a good way, if the meeting between the generations is fruitful:

> If we journey together, young and old, we can be firmly rooted in the present, and from here, revisit the past and look to the future. To revisit the past in order to learn from history and heal old wounds that at times still trouble us. To look to the future in order to nourish our enthusiasm, cause dreams to emerge, awaken prophecies and enable hope to blossom (199).

This is the major challenge of the today's church and society "so that we may seek together a better world, under the ever new impetus of the Holy Spirit."

The youth synod allowed this wonderful, mutual, intergenerational encounter to happen.
Pope Francis invites us to get in the same boat and move forward together. He shares an inspiring image, mentioned by Joe, a young synod listener from the Samoa Islands, who spoke of:

> "…the church as a canoe, in which the elderly help to keep on course by judging the position of the stars, while the young keep rowing, imagining what waits for them ahead. Let us steer clear of young people who think that adults represent a meaningless past, and those adults who always think they know how young people should act. Instead, let us all climb aboard the same canoe and together seek a better world, with the constantly renewed momentum of the Holy Spirit" (201).

CHAPTER 7

Chapter 7 is then devoted to **Youth Ministry.** He pleads for *a pastoral care that is synodal* because the synod has clearly highlighted that synodality is the key to the evangelization of young people, the very way of transmitting the faith today. And the key words to live this pastoral care with and for young people with new styles and new approaches are: audacity, creativity, flexibility, proximity, gratuity, participation, co-responsibility. "It should involve a 'journeying together' that values 'the charisms that the Spirit bestows in accordance with the vocation and role of each of the church's members, through a process of co-responsibility (206) to "reflect that wonderful multi-faceted reality that Christ's church is meant to be" (207).

Pope Francis then outlined *three main courses of action*:

ecclesial experience and aims to stimulate this experience in each reader: the experience of the ever deeper personal encounter with Christ presented fundamentally as a friend. It is an intrinsically personal and communal experience. May *Christus Vivit* help us and help the whole church to be ever more faithful to its vocation to be at the service of the humanization of the world.

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