

SYNOD ADDRESS
23 SEPTEMBER 2007

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Peter said: "Lord, how wonderful it is for us to be here." That's just how I feel. Don't you? It's so exciting! I thank God that I belong to the most beautiful Archdiocese in the world. And now there's history in the making! A Synod! A momentous first for the Archdiocese of Cape Town! For the first time ever, representatives of the people of God, from Lambert's Bay on the west coast right down to Agulhas in the south and inland from Clanwilliam to Caledon, are gathering together in communion, to seek guidance and listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. This is the time for transfiguration of the Church into what God wants us to be - the dynamic, living, loving Body of Christ. What a wonderful honour and opportunity this is for us! What daunting challenges we face! What an awesome responsibility to those we represent! It's as if we're travelling on a journey to a mysterious, but longed for, destination and none of us has ever been there before. For the past 18 months we have been praying, working, listening, discussing, analysing and preparing, and now with suitcases packed, we're set to jet off. But wait – before take off, we need a visa, a group visa. So that means we all need to comply. This is the final stage for preparation for the Synod – a scrutiny of heart and mind. I have a checklist of "dos and don'ts" using the acronym PEACE.

P.

What should our disposition be?

Prayerful.

Patient.

Productive.

Positive.

Peaceful - at peace with another. St Paul said to the Ephesians: "Do all you can to preserve the unity of the Spirit by the peace that binds you together." It is absolutely vital that we approach the Synod with hearts that are free of anger, bitterness, frustration, guilt and resentment, lest we block the work of the Holy Spirit. We are wounded people who all carry the burdens and scars of apartheid. Until we can place our feet in the shoes of each other, we can never empathise fully with the pain suffered or the burden of regret and we will never be one in mind and heart as Jesus prayed we would be. Until people's stories are heard, it is hard for memories to heal and I strongly, though respectfully, advocate that, before any other post Synod steps be taken, prayerful Reconciliation and Healing Services be held throughout the Archdiocese. But let us be reconciled to God and to one another here and now. Please link hands as we pray with

the psalmist: "A pure heart create for me, O God. Put a steadfast spirit within me. O wash me more and more from my guilt and cleanse me from my sin." Let us offer one another a heartfelt sign of peace. Thank you.

Now, what would be counter-productive attitudes?

Preconceived ideas. Please leave them at the door! Be prepared to change your mind! Jesus said: "I will make all things new." The Holy Spirit will certainly surprise us, perhaps even shock us.

Pride.

Presumption.

Political Correctness. Was Jesus PC? No. He was radical. And so should we be in defending the weak, denouncing injustice and upholding our faith.

E.

Equality. We are all equal and no one is more equal than another! Our intellectual ability or qualifications will not be as valuable as our humility and openness to the voice of the Spirit. Look at the apostles – a motley bunch to start with and see what God did through and with and for them. Look at Bernadette of Lourdes and the children of Fatima. God chooses those who may appear to us to be unlikely messengers.

Empathy - in listening to one another; the ability to swap shoes.

Enthusiasm. An endless supply is required.

Endurance. This Synod is merely starting a process of renewal and rejuvenation.

Expectations. Yes, but be warned - God will guide us possibly not as we anticipate. So, be open.

The negatives.

Ego.

Enmity. Please leave behind.

A.

Attitude. Let's examine our consciences and ensure that our reason for participating is sound; that we come to listen, to learn, to help and to share – not to domineer or disparage.

Ability - God's gift to you.

Availability - your gift to God and to the community.

Awareness - that we, as church, are a family, which must include the entire Archdiocese. We must think and be conscious of the needs outside

of our own parishes. Better communication in the future will foster this. How about parish wish lists advertised on Radio Veritas or in the Southern Cross. Special celebrations like the Music Festivals held in 1998 and 1999 which, being part of that 400 strong choir singing the Hallelujah Chorus, I will remember all my life, the Jubilee Celebration at Green Point Stadium and the Good Hope Centre occasion were all tremendously uplifting and unifying experiences. The yearly presentation of all the Elect in the Cathedral as part of the RCIA Programme and the Holy Thursday Chrism Mass are such moving celebrations. It's so stirring to see the faithful gathered in large numbers, united in prayer and praise. No doubt the way forward will focus on this aspect.

The negatives.

(Your own) Agenda - not wanted on this voyage!

C.

Charisms - given to you for the benefit of the community and vital for the Synod. Some of you are able to read the signs of the times; some can prophecy; some can hear more clearly the voice of the Holy Spirit. We must expect signs and wonders as they always accompany the work of the Holy Spirit. Please advertise them. Share the good news!

Charity. Let us say and do everything in the love of the Lord.

Consideration - of the feelings of others.

Criticism - only if constructive.

Childlike trust - that we will be led by the Spirit.

The negatives.

Comfort zones. There can be none.

E.

Now we come to the final E, the most important of all. I've saved the best for last.

Evangelisation. Unless we are evangelised, filled with the joy of the Lord, imbued with both the Word and the Spirit of the Good News of our salvation; and unless we are dedicated disciples of Jesus, our every effort

will be fruitless. We will be those useless branches cut off from the vine and thrown into the fire to be burnt. Jesus said: “Go out to the whole world, proclaim the Good News” (Mark 16 : 15) and “Go, make disciples of all nations.” (Matthew 18 : 19). This Great Commission has become the Great Omission. Even some religious, who have dedicated their lives in obedience to this command, may be in need of re-evangelisation. And what about us lay people. How many disciples have we made? Is evangelisation the top priority in every parish in this Archdiocese? Not yet, although the Church exists to evangelise. In our Archdiocese there are 220000 registered Catholics – a mere 5% of the population. Of these, however, only about 20% regularly attend Mass. This can surely only mean that these “inactive” brothers and sisters of ours do not have a real relationship with Jesus. If they did, our churches would be bursting at the seams. We have not made disciples of them for all the catechism we may have taught. Why not? Perhaps we simply don’t know how. Do our hearts burn within us like the disciples at Emmaus? Are we so filled with joy and zeal that we overflow with love for all? Is that light of faith burning brightly for all to see? Are we Jesus to everyone we meet? Do we really appreciate the wonder of the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery, what the God of all creation did just because He loves us? It’s not Good News – it’s absolutely stupendous, mind blowing News! We just have to share it! I wonder why we admire self made men. We are God made men and women – that’s infinitely superior. We are an Easter people but we don’t seem to have internalised this message yet. Where’s the joy? The Holy Spirit has anointed us for service and mission as disciples. God is calling us to share in the most amazing work in history – establishing His kingdom in this world. It’s our responsibility! Isn’t it wonderful how God works? In response to the call by Pope John Paul II for a new evangelisation, Cape Town’s very own Catholic School of Evangelisation was launched this year. Its members are fired up with the desire to make disciples for Jesus and these disciples will in turn be empowered to make other disciples. The School’s vision is to help develop a mission mentality in every Parish in this Archdiocese within 5 years – a tall order indeed! But Jesus said that we would be able to do even greater things than He did. Imagine – greater than curing the sick, than casting our demons, than raising the dead. We say that with God all things are possible but we seem to forget that we are the instruments He wants to use for His work. Now indeed is the favourable time. This Synod is a time of grace for us, a time for new vision, new impetus and renewed dedication to God’s service. If we are to fulfil our mission, this beautiful Mother City and land which God lovingly created for us and which He has filled with such a rich diversity of cultures and peoples, must be transfigured into a united worshipping family. Our 74 parishes must be linked up in support of one another – one Body of Christ. Impossible? Don’t even think it!

As we approach the Synod let’s remember PEACE.

Prayerful and at Peace with one another.

Equal before God and man.

Aware of the needs of the Archdiocese.

Charismatic and Charitable.

Evangelised.

And our visa will be granted. God is in control. He is the pilot. All we need do now is walk up the steps to the plane, in the footsteps of Jesus, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and say "Here I am, Lord, I come to do your will." It is indeed wonderful to be here.