

**97th Diocesan Synod
Lusitanian Church (Portugal)**

**«From baptism to discipleship; the Church in Mission"
(Matthew 28: 16-20)**

Address of the Diocesan Bishop

Five years of my Episcopal Consecration were celebrated on April 25th (the Day of Saint Mark's the Evangelist). Not being a long period, in the exercise of an Episcopate, it allows, however, a retrospective look of balance and meditation on the journey. As expected, it was an intense time of multiple experiences, where the common focus is on the experience and management of human relationships, which by nature are always challenging and complex. The poetic biblical image of the Good Shepherd and the flock (*John 10: 7-20*) can sometimes elude the natural tension underlying any group, community, and church. In fact, "*every person is a world*", and recognizing and working with this reality becomes a pastoral imperative. As someone very well pointed out, more important than the result achieved is the process that leads to a certain performance. Moreover, in the Church, by nature, the way we do it should be based on the human relationships, the meeting between people, and the respect for the natural diversity that exists. It is because of being the Bishop the shepherd of the flock, and that in his ministry, he is called to be related, and to relate to concrete people and communities, each living in their joys and sorrows, but all anchored in the person of Jesus Christ, the foundation of the Church. This way of seeking to be with people, understand people, and to accompany them in their own vicissitudes, has undoubtedly constituted one of the greatest demands of the Episcopacy, but a source of human and spiritual enrichment.

Any pastoral ministry in the Church must necessarily start from this basis of availability to meet, to share, listening and establishing new human relationships. Today world with a very busy daily rhythm and with little time to human meetings, we understand how everyone needs to be welcomed and heard in their singularity. The essence of being is based on encounter and communion, and the essence of the mission of the Church, in the light of the example of Jesus

Christ, requires knowing how to be available and having time for others. As a result, this requirement is in particular to the Bishop and Clergy, the shepherd of the shepherds, and the shepherds of the various flocks. What marks the quality of our Ministry is and will always be the quality of the time we dedicate to others in building relationships of true community and love. Here I have learned how important is a good time management that God entrusts to us, sustained in the discipline of personal organization, able to combine work with rest, prayer with commitment and individual life with collective life. Moreover, the specificity of the Christian ministry requires that our time be taken by the time of God and that we seek to receive through prayer the sustenance that only God can give us for our daily work.

Being the Bishop, the pastor of the Diocese, he faces the great and permanent challenge of knowing how to reconcile the necessary times in the various areas of his Ministry. The nature of his ministerial function and the administrative and legal requirements stemming from his status as the first head of the Church imply great versatility in the performance of tasks, which are sometimes very different from one another, and which require natural performance specificities. I thank God for the diversified group of people who have helped and assisted me in the execution of multiple tasks in very different areas. This is the great challenge of being able to delegate and entrust to others with what they can do for themselves (and they do it very well!). The challenge is giving priority to the areas of intervention according to the opportunities that arises. Delegation and prioritization require discernment and trust, and also a constant detachment from the acquired in order to dare new forms of service. It is also incumbent upon the different management bodies of the Church, the permanent and critical analysis of their own functioning, so that it can respond to new challenges and opportunities that the evolution of times always brings to the Church that we are.

Five years of Episcopacy allow us to have a vision of the whole that constitutes the Diocese. A finer, deeper, and therefore more realistic vision than the initial one. The reality of the Church, even of a small Church such as ours, is diverse and encompasses different levels of complementarity. The being of the Church that we are and its influence is not confined to the numerical expression of any community, much less to the simple arithmetical sum of the number of believers

or the number of parishes, although this, of course, is also important. In fact, since the Lusitanian Church is a Historical Church, its Parishes are already part of the social fabric that surrounds them, establishing with it various bonds and relationships, which undoubtedly constitutes an opportunity for Mission. On the other hand, the Lusitanian Church has a statute established in society and in the ecclesial environment in Portugal, which projects it beyond itself and entails natural responsibilities and demands for all its members and governing bodies. In addition, his membership of the large Anglican family allows it to be and contribute to various international forums. What identifies us today is only understandable at the light of this communion that expresses the catholicity of the Church that we are. The network of internal and external relations of the Lusitanian Church is very large and diverse and we can say that it is growing with the new mission front opened by the Lusophone Network of the Anglican Communion. The Bishop and the Church, naturally, have to organize themselves in function of this demanding and the new framework of representation and mission that has gained expression in recent years.

Throughout this time of Episcopacy, the more direct contact with the reality of the parishes of the Church has allowed us to confirm weaknesses already known, and others that have come to be revealed and in particular in the Southern Archdeaconry. As it will be propose for discussion to this Synod, there are communities in the Southern Archdeaconry, which no longer have a minimal parish structure due to the very small number of people who compose them. In addition, in other parishes of this Archdeaconry, there have been changes at the pastoral level, with the natural demands that the times of transition always entail. The combination of these two factors, coupled with the geographical dispersion of these parishes, has brought a great demand to the development of the Church's missionary work in the Southern Archdeaconry. In addition, the shortage of Clergy with availability and capacity does not aid the development and monitoring of new forms of Mission. The demands of this ecclesial framework then requires the realism of the gaze of faith. A look capable of accepting weakness and simplicity, a look capable of understanding, even in the small number, the expression always full of the presence of the body of Christ gathered. The simplicity and humility of many celebrations held in this context of the the

South Archdeaconry has been for me a time of strong ecclesial experience, thanksgiving and interpellation. I have always felt the presence and action of the Holy Spirit that gives us the necessary confidence that the Psalmist tells us (*Psalm 31: 1*). I am moved by the true testimonies of faith, commitment, sacrifice and love for the Church, which many and many of them expresses and in particular the elderly at our parishes. Challenging and hopeful has also been to realize how, even in the exigency of this ecclesial framework, the Holy Spirit does not fail to arouse new accessions to the Church, new signs of hope and renewal, new ministerial and pastoral commitments, new visions of work in places, and places that our earthly gaze already gave as lost, but that our look of faith, sustained in the Holy Spirit, reveals to us as new and renewed opportunities of mission for God. The mission that we want to develop, therefore, requires the analysis of reality, because it is very painful and demanding, and the consequent decision-making process.

The reality of this picture naturally leads us to the need and demand of an Episcopal Ministry sustained in prayer and in the transforming action of the Holy Spirit. If the mission is from God, it is God that leads our work. A simple and logical axiom that often comes up against our excess of activism and the difficulty in letting God use our freedom for the fulfillment of His will and truth. This is undoubtedly the great challenge to the Bishop and to every believer, which consists in making prayer the true sustentability of the mission we are called to fulfill. Individually and collectively, we are all called together as the people of God, to grow in the filial relationship with the Father and to penetrate into the intimacy lived in the bosom of the Trinity. Prayer is the way and the door for this to happen and for everything to change. Today, in the reality of the Church that we are and the Mission to which we are called, we must take prayer seriously, if we want God to transform us and that many others are also transformed by Him through our witness. It is thus fundamental that in the concrete of our personal life, the life of our communities, our Churches, our families and in other contexts, small groups come together to pray to be transformed and transforming. Here, for example, is a good reason and excuse to open the doors of the churches during the week, or open our own houses to others, whether day or night, for groups that meets to pray and praying for life's sharing. A group of believers, who in the power of

prayer, put before God the Churches various ministries and help the Church to discern the paths it must follow. In the simplicity of prayer and in its power, the Church has an enormous potential for growth and renewal.

I am pleased to record here, the recent creation in this same Cathedral of St. Paul, of a daily Morning Prayer time, in the reopening chapel of St. Lazarus. Sequentially and on each day of the week, the different parishes, departments and pastoral leaders are placed in prayer before God. In the mother church that is the Cathedral, the entire diocese is placed in prayer before the Lord of the Church. We trust that God leaves no unanswered prayer (*Matthew 7: 7-12*) and always opens us new visions and ways of realizing His plan for His Church. In this sense, the recent Novena of Ascensions to Pentecost, integrated in the "Thy Kingdom come", was a new and challenging time, which we know has been taken seriously by many and will not fail to bear fruit. With this vision, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby said:

"For eleven days and in more than one hundred countries, we were together in prayer for the third consecutive year of this movement that we call "Thy Kingdom Come ". We ask God to pour out His Holy Spirit on His united people, to strengthen us in sharing the revolutionary love of Jesus Christ with our friends, families, communities and nations. I am deeply joyful in the way God is so powerfully working through this global prayer movement. When we unite in prayer, we are already a clear sign of the Kingdom."

The challenge we face today is to value and discern the signs of the Kingdom among us, most of which are always simple and discreet signs placed by God within the Church, the communities and the world. It is not so much, as it is said today, that we have "a thought and a positive attitude towards life", but always understanding in those signs and realities the loving presence of God that never forgets us and always trusts us . The look of faith that is able to discern these signs (*Luke 12: 54-57*), then engages us in the act of cherishing and growing that which is simple and discreet. In this way, the confidence and the sense of hope that grows in us allows us to raise our gaze to the future that God offers us.

And it is on this future following the present reality that the Synod of the Church is called to pray, to meditate and to planning. The exercise of the faith that is offered to all of us is that of entering into the vision that God has for the Lusitanian

Church and for its mission and this is only possible in the action of the Holy Spirit in each one of us and in the Church in general. Internally we realize how important it is to continue the path opened by the Pilgrim course of education in faith. A path that has been of meeting, of sharing and formation and in which life is placed before the vision of faith and it is confronted with the great themes of our existence. We also realize how important it is to cherish and welcome the children and young people who are to be the Church of tomorrow. Also the need we have *to open our Churches more and to signal* them to the community, spreading who we are and what we do for the good of all. We need to improve *the care and beauty of the liturgical celebrations* so that the richness of its symbolism and its effectiveness may constitute for all, already, a foretaste of the Kingdom of God. Here I am necessarily referring to the perfection of praise, *aware of the importance that music and singing* have in expressing and the way of living faith and in inviting new people to the communities. I also mention what is already happening in some communities and with good fruits and which combines the offering of bread with the spiritual food of the Word of God (*Matthew 4:4*). That is, the sharing of what we have with the needy, also leads us to share with them faith in Jesus Christ and to be simultaneously challenged and enriched by the life experience of these brothers and sisters whom God presents to us, for sometimes in unexpected ways. In a Church of ministerial structure, the nourishment of vocations to the priesthood and its preparation for the exercise of the ministry, constitute a necessity and a imperative work that the Church has to assume in its various demands. From experience, I realize now, that this particular area is not only a responsibility of the Bishop who ordains, as many people think, but it is also a responsibility of the whole Church and of each particular community. In the way the people of God pray for the vocations to the ministry in the Church and the way in which they exercise their *sensus fidelium*, the discernment of faith, the Church will be more blessed with new Ministers for the communities. It is not enough to feel the need for the Church to have more Ministers, it is necessary for each one to be involved in this process, through prayer, discernment and a friendly word and guidance to those whom God is calling to His harvest (*Luke 10:2*).

In preparing for the future, the Lusitanian Church has to understand the social and cultural context in which it is called to carry out its Mission. For *good and bad*, we all have an awareness of the deep interdependence in which we live, whether in the political way (European Union), financially (the international capitalistic system), environment (climate changes) or communication (the Internet). More than ever, it is important to have a "*global vision so that we can act locally*". With the specific characteristics of our country, most of the issues and challenges that face us are also lived internationally. It is in this context, from a global society crossed by common challenges and hopes that the international proposal of *intentional discipleship* to be assumed by the Church of Christ in its diversity of traditions. It comes from the awareness of the validity and timeliness of the Christian proposal for solving today's problems. Faith in Jesus Christ gives us a holistic view of the world and of society, capable of interconnecting and proposing new paths, for issues such as economic differences and poverty, corruption and a lack of ethics in politics, climate changes and in the growing lack of meaning and confidence for the collective future of humanity. Thus, faced with a complex set of challenges on a world scale, the churches today are called together by God for a more concrete and effective integration and intervention in solving current problems and in building new paths for humanity. For this, their discipleship has to be intentional and concrete, and Christians must assume the implications of their Baptism that leads them to a commitment to discipleship in the various areas of life and throughout it. It is about living the faith as a gift with implications in the family, in the studies, in professions, in social life and in all, all the areas in which we move and exist. We cannot hide what is to be visible to all (Luke 8: 16-18) and we cannot share what is to be enjoyed in its entirety. In this sense and openness, intentional discipleship does not deal with the survival of the Church but of the effective need of the Church to be a sign of the Kingdom of God in the world in which we live. The world needs the Church and the Church needs assumed disciples. Intentional discipleship then engages us in the life of the Church and in life in general and in particular in the various areas of our personal lives. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is truly the good news that must be lived and shared with joy through the word and the concrete and intentional acts. This will transform not only the Church that we are but too the world in which we live.

In my responsibility as Bishop and Pastor, I consider this vision, this proposal and this path, the most important for the concrete of the Church that we are and want to be. Assuming our weaknesses, we also take on our strengths and abilities and combine the present time with the future of God. To this end, each one of us, beginning with the Bishop, should pray in the presence of God, so that the Lord may help us, to a discipleship of a life more self-conscious and a discipleship capable of touching the lives of others, not for our honor, but to the honor and glory of God. This will necessarily have implications for our individual ways of being and as a Church. A change, if we want, of the cultural and ecclesial paradigm, which translates into;

- a Church that seeks to go and not just to be;
- an open church, not a closed Church;
- a church that seeks to grow and dare and not just maintain;
- a more inclusive and less reserved Church;
- a more prophetic and less well-to-do Church;
- a Church that prepares and equips for the mission;
- a more intentional and less routine Church;
- a church of disciples and not only of baptized persons;

that is, a church which is allowed to be guided by the Holy Spirit ... and who receives His newness by renewing itself from within, which are capable of receiving new vessels, and new vessels capable of receiving new wine
(*Matthew 9: 14-17*).

After five years of Episcopacy, I thank God for the way the Lord supported me and the Church supported me. Aware of the fragility of my ministry, it comforts me and encourages me to be in the Synod, in the support and encouragement of one another and in reciprocal prayer. The reason for closing a first five-year cycle is only with the need to look at the future, not the Bishop, but rather a Synodic Church, which is done along the way, and looking together at the future,

sustained by the action of the Holy Spirit, our discipleship and testimony will be more fruitful. This is also the reason for the proposal that we will discuss in order to become part of the decade of intentional discipleship that already helps us to look with confidence for the future.

May God help us!

Amen.

+ Jorge Pina Cabral,

Vila Nova de Gaia, May 28, 2018