



SYNOD OF BISHOPS: YOUNG PEOPLE, FAITH AND VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT

Bishop Mark O'Toole

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Holy Father, brother Bishops, dear brothers and sisters,

From the age of 17, Jesus has exerted an attraction over my heart; no other can match the magnetic pull of His love, or the peace that His friendship brings.

The young are looking for a passionate faith, one that is intellectually and practically reliable. Nobody wants to be part of something which has died the death of a thousand distinctions.

In the mental or personal fragility that many witness to, faith which is held deep in the heart, also opens up the possibility of beginning anew each day. Only walking this path ourselves, will enable us to be with young people in a humble way.

As you, Holy Father, have said, credibility and authenticity are crucial. The cases of historic abuse within the Church, recorded in so many parts of the world, are a counter sign. Young people rightly expect that we put victim survivors at the centre of what we do.

Lay experts, and just statutory authorities, are an essential part of how we review such situations, in order to make assessments with us, of these difficult matters.

This is also true for us Bishops. We, too, must be subject to processes as robust as those we would expect for our priests.

In the face of such challenges we are to embrace more deeply the Marian dimension of the Church's life. On this day we recall, of happy memory, Pope Saint John XXIII, and his description of the Church as "the loving mother of all... gentle, patient and full of tenderness." (Opening Address of the Second Vatican Council, 11 October, 1962).

In God's holy people we find all we need to help heal the wounds of this present crisis. Pope St John Paul spoke of the "genius of women" (*Mulieris Dignitatem*) as an important part of this Marian dimension.

Mothers, including consecrated women who are spiritual mothers among us, can help us to be tender and loving to the young, whilst also protecting the little ones from the wolves, and so ridding the Church of this evil. This, in turn, can be a service of healing and lead to the prevention of this, and other forms of abuse, which have been shared so poignantly by many brother bishops and others, and which are so widespread in our countries.

Dear young people, thank you for being among us in these days. Please tell your peers that each of them has a place in the heart of Jesus, for each is a beloved child of the Father, and called to be with Him forever.

Jesus wants great things of you, for the Church and for the good of society. He is the One who can lead you to where you could never imagine it was possible to go.

Thank you.

+ Mark O'Toole

Bishop Mark O'Toole is a first-time Synod Father at the Synod of Bishops on 'Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment. He is Bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Plymouth in South West England and Chair of the Department for Evangelisation and Catechesis of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.