

On eve of novel synod, pope asks pardon for new index of sins

By [Elise Ann Allen](#)

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ROME – Prior to beginning the last phase in a synod process that has seen several novelties, including the participation of laypeople and the right of women to vote, Pope Francis led a penitential service asking forgiveness for a new list of sins.

On that list were the sins against synodality and “of using doctrine as stones to be hurled” at others.

Speaking during the Oct. 1 penitential service in St. Peter’s Basilica, the pope said, “the Church is always the Church of the poor in spirit and of sinners in search of forgiveness, and not only of the righteous and the saints, but rather, of the righteous and saints who recognize themselves as poor and sinners.”

He said that he wrote the requests for forgiveness read aloud by various cardinals during the liturgy himself, “because it was necessary to call our sins by name.”

Cardinal Oswald Gracious of Bombay during the liturgy asked forgiveness for “the sin of lack of courage, the courage necessary to seek peace and recognize the dignity of every person,” as well as the failure to respect life “in all its phases.”

“To make peace it takes courage: To say yes to the encounter and no to the clash; yes to the respect of agreements and no to provocations; yes to sincerity and no to duplicity,” he said, asking pardon for the justification of war and discrimination.

Cardinal Michael Czerny, prefect of the Dicastery for the Service of Integral Human Development, asked forgiveness for sins against creation, indigenous peoples, and migrants, calling out the exploitation of the earth and colonialist instincts, and asking forgiveness for participation in “the globalization of indifference.”

Cardinal Sean O’Malley, archbishop emeritus of Boston and president of the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors, asked forgiveness for the sin of abuse, including abuses of conscience, power, and sexual abuse.

He specifically prayed “for all the times we have used the condition of ordained ministry and consecrated life to commit this terrible sin, feeling safe and protected while we were profiting diabolically from the little ones and the poor.”

Cardinal Kevin Farrell, prefect of the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life asked forgiveness for sins against women, the family, and young people.

He asked pardon on behalf of all in the Church, “especially us men, feeling shame for all the times that we have not recognized and defended the dignity of women, for when we made them mute and *succubi*, and not infrequently exploited, especially in the condition of consecrated life.”

Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, Prefect of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, asked forgiveness for “all the times that in the Church, especially us pastors who are entrusted with the task of confirming our brothers and sisters in the faith, have not been

able to guard and propose the Gospel as a living source of eternal newness, 'indoctrinating it' and risking reducing it to a pile of dead stones to be thrown at others."

"I beg forgiveness, feeling shame for all the times we have given doctrinal justification to inhuman treatment," and for efforts to obstruct the "various legitimate inculturations of the truth of Jesus Christ," he said.

Cardinal Cristóbal López Romero, archbishop of Rabat asked for forgiveness for the turning of one's head the other way "in front of the sacrament of the poor, preferring to adorn ourselves and the altar with guilty valuables that steal bread from the hungry."

He also asked pardon for giving into the "seduction of power and the flattery" of privilege and titles, as well as for staying closed in "self-referentiality" and therefore failing to reach the physical and existential peripheries.

Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, archbishop of Vienna, asked forgiveness for the failure to build "a truly synodal, symphonic Church, aware of being holy people of God who walk together recognizing the common baptismal dignity."

He prayed for pardon for "preferring to listen to ourselves, defending opinions and ideologies that hurt the communion in Christ of all," and for transforming "authority into power, suffocating plurality, not listening to people, making it difficult for many brothers and sisters to participate in the mission of the Church."

In addition to the petitions for forgiveness, three testimonies were also given, representing victims of sexual abuse, of war, and of the plights of migration.

Sister Deema, from Homs, Syria, spoke of the civil war that has torn her country apart, leading, she said, to “the rejection of all forms of empathy, labelling the other as an enemy and even in extreme cases dehumanizing him/her and justifying their killing.”

It requires “extraordinary effort” to heal relationships, she said, and called for a commitment to “nonviolent resistance.”

Laurence, a vocalist from South Africa, spoke of being sexually abused by a priest as an 11-year-old, and of the lasting psychological toll abuse takes on victims, their families, and their communities, as well as the difficulty of survivors in speaking out and a lack of transparency in the Church.

“For decades, accusations were ignored, covered up, or handled internally rather than reported to authorities. This lack of accountability has not only allowed abusers to continue their behavior but has also eroded the trust that so many once placed in the institution,” he said.

He said the Church’s reluctance to address these crimes “has been a disservice to the victims and a betrayal of the Church’s ethical and spiritual responsibilities.”

He also spoke about the impact of the scandals on society, saying they have damaged the Church’s credibility and broke trust.

“When an institution as prominent as the Catholic Church fails to protect its most vulnerable members, it sends a message that justice and accountability are negotiable—when in reality, they should be fundamental,” he said.

Sara, director of Fondazione Migrantes, spoke of her experience working with migrants near the Italian island of Lampedusa, noting that many who make it to their care are traumatized, malnourished and have “suffered violence of every kind.”

Pope Francis in his own remarks said sin is something that always wounds relationships, firstly with God and also with others.

“No one is saved alone, but it is equally true that the sin of one leaves effects on many,” he said, saying the Church “is in its essence of faith and proclamation always rational, and only by healing sick relationships can we become a synodal Church.”

The Church, and believers, he said, must recognize their errors in order to heal wounds and be credible witnesses.

This begins by confessing one’s sins, he said, and questioned how often believers have given space only to themselves and their ideas, judgements and views, without making space for God or others.

“Today we are all like the tax collector, we have our eyes downcast, and we are ashamed of our sins. Like him, we remain behind, freeing up the space occupied by presumption, hypocrisy, and pride,” he said.

Francis insisted that it is not possible to invoke God’s name without also asking forgiveness from one’s brothers and sisters, as well as of the earth and all creatures.

“In the fact of evil and the suffering of the innocent we ask: where are you, Lord? But we must ask ourselves and question ourselves about the responsibilities we have when we are unable to stop evil with good.”

Believers cannot “pretend to resolve conflicts by fueling violence that becomes more and more brutal, redeem ourselves by causing pain, save ourselves with the death of the other,” he said.

It is necessary to confess one’s sins before synod in order to reestablish trust and make one’s witness more credible, he said, saying, “we must do our part, even making mistakes.”

“We continue in the mission to the best of our ability, but now we turn to you young people who expect us to pass on our testimony, asking forgiveness from you too if we have not been credible,” he said.

Pope Francis closed his prayer asking forgiveness “for all our sins” and asking God to help the Church “to restore your face that we have disfigured with our infidelity. We ask forgiveness, feeling ashamed, to those who have been hurt by our sins.”

Formally opened by the pontiff in October 2021, the Synod of Bishops on Synodality is a multi-stage process of consultation that has unfolded at the local, national, continental and universal levels.

After an initial Rome-based gathering last year that marked the first time that laypeople generally were allowed to participate, and that women were given voting rights, the synod will culminate with this month’s Oct. 2-27 Rome gathering, which gathers 368 prelates from around the world.

<https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2024/10/on-eve-of-novel-synod-pope-asks-pardon-for-new-index-of-sins>