



# Synodality as kairos

*An Augustinian  
perspective*

*Ariccia, October 10, 2025*

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*On-going formation meeting  
of the Order of Augustinian Recollects  
**Jubilee of Consecrated Life***

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### 1. Introduction

Two Greek terms perfectly summarize the times we are living in.

1. *Krisis* (a moment of profound change, choice, and decision)

The *Final Document* of the Synod states emphatically that "consecrated life is called to challenge the Church and society with its prophetic voice" (Francis - XVI Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Final Document of the Second Session*, October 2024, n. 65). I believe that, often, the *crisis* of religious in general and of Augustinians in particular responds to three demands: coherence, credibility, and visibility.

- *Consistency*: it is not just a matter of quoting St. Augustine in our documents, speeches, and homilies, nor of multiplying rhetorical statements that abound in platitudes that have little meaning for us. It is a matter of taking on Augustine's vital and spiritual experience, of living the charism of the Order in all its radicality. And doing so in the particular context, that is, in the concrete temporal, geographical, and cultural reality.
- *Credibility*: Augustinian religious life, always understood as an ecclesial reality, links us to the dynamism of our origins and propels us toward a future of meaning and hope. In other words, it presents itself as an alternative to the problems, needs, and challenges of today's world. Let us not live on the glories of the past (incidentally, we can never return to the past); let us be a living leaven in the present. This is not nostalgia, but enthusiasm.
- *Visibility*: Augustinian spirituality is not realized in the "*fuga mundi*," but is inserted into it. From the beginning, Augustinians have gone to cities and taken on a variety of pastoral care with and among the people. It is necessary to overcome the temptation of isolation (self-referentiality, to use Pope Francis' term) and opt for presence and visibility.

2. *Kairos* (time of grace, fortune, risk, and unique and unrepeatable opportunity)

In recent times, the Lord has responded to our requests, to our prayers, with *the synodal process in the Church*: he asks us to get involved, taking advantage of the enormous opportunity for renewal that it presents. How do we accept this gift? How do we respond?

"We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not weep." [...] "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes" (Mt 11:17, 21).

Jesus gives us the key: "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, this was your good pleasure" (Mt 11:25-26). The starting point is undoubtedly humility.

## 2. Be a channel, not a wall

In his first greeting to the People of God, Pope Leo XIV emphatically stated: "We want to be a synodal Church." And he has referred to synodality on many occasions. I would like to recall the homily during the Pentecost Vigil on June 7, 2025: "On the evening of my election, looking with emotion at the people of God here, I remembered the word 'synodality,' which happily expresses the way in which the Spirit shapes the Church. This word echoes syn—which means with—which constitutes the secret of God's life. God is not solitude. [...] At the same time, synodality reminds us of the path—odós—because where the Spirit is, there is movement, there is a path. We are a people on a journey." What is at stake is communion and dynamism.

### 2.1. Errors and prejudices

Not understanding synodality well has decisive consequences: instead of being a channel of God's grace, we can be a wall that blocks it for ourselves and for others.

- Some problems stem from ideologization and polarization. They have little to do with Christianity. It would be good for these people to reflect on charity as the cornerstone of Christian life.
- Others come from a poor understanding of what synodality is. We are not guided by prejudices (clericalist) or false dreams (assembly-based), much less by strange ideologies, but by the Gospel and Tradition, allowing ourselves to be enlightened by the Magisterium (in this regard, cf. International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, Vatican 2018).
- Other problems, finally, come from fear and comfort. We are not willing to take on what synodality implies. And we make excuses: "it is not necessary"; "it has always been done this way"; "the Synod is over." Synodality is a constitutive dimension of the Church; it refers us to what the Church is in itself.

Synodality means deepening our communion with Christ and with our brothers and sisters; developing involvement and co-responsibility in the variety of vocations, charisms, and ministries; promoting shared mission in today's world. It does not end there.

### 2.2. Conversion

The synodal Church does not exist without spiritual conversion. A synodal spirituality springs from the action of the Holy Spirit and requires listening to the Word of God, contemplation, silence, and conversion of heart.

The *Final Document* speaks to us of conversion. And the whole process has insisted on this: conversion to Christ, experience of Christ, transformation in Christ. And its structure offers us a beautiful synthesis: Part I. Called by the Holy Spirit to conversion; Part II. The conversion of relationships; Part III. The conversion of processes; Part IV. The conversion of bonds; Part V. Forming a people of missionary disciples.

- Conversion to holiness

Synodality aims at coherence and holiness in the Church. It must be clear that the synodal Church is the only Church, that of the Lord Jesus. *Lumen gentium* (LG) reminds us, first, that all who believe in Christ, whatever their state or condition, are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity and, second, that this holiness promotes a more human standard of living in earthly society itself. The holiness of the Church is manifested in the fruits of grace that the Spirit produces in the faithful; therefore, it is expressed in various ways in each of those who strive to attain perfect charity in their own lives and thus edify others. Therefore, in the various states of life and in the various tasks, a single holiness is cultivated by those who are moved by the Spirit of God<sup>1</sup>.

- Relational conversion

Only by looking at the Gospel can we map out the conversion that is asked of us, learning to make Jesus' attitudes our own (cf. n. 50). And here a theme opens up to which the *Final Document* devotes special attention: relational conversion. We must learn from the Gospel "that caring for relationships is not a strategy or a tool for greater organizational efficiency, but rather the way in which God the Father has revealed himself in Jesus and in the Spirit. When our relationships, even in their fragility, allow the grace of Christ, the love of the Father, and the communion of the Spirit to shine through, we confess with our lives our faith in the Triune God" (*ibid.*).

### 2.3. Four principles

I would like to recall the four principles (cf. Francis, *Evangelii gaudium*, 222-237) which, applied to the synodal process, can enlighten us as keys to interpretation and help us in the work of the Chapter:

- *The whole is greater than the part*: we think in terms of processes and not disconnected events. That is why synodality is not limited to and resolved solely in the Synod of Bishops. Rather, it appears as a dimension of the Church that never ends.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. LG, 39-41.

- *Time is superior to space*: it is a matter of working in the long term, without obsessing over immediate results. The harvest depends on the Lord; we are asked to sow with generosity, constancy, and joy.
- *Unity prevails over conflict*: conflict should not be ignored or concealed, but accepted, without getting caught up in it. Through communal discernment, in the light of the Spirit, communion in diversity can develop. Pluriform unity.
- *Reality is more important than the idea*: the idea does not end up separated from reality, but is concretized in it. The synodal process is defined in decision-making, in concrete choices at all levels. The Word is incarnated and put into practice.

### 3. Synodal keys

#### 3.1. Baptism

Returning to the ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council (cf. *Lumen gentium* and *Gaudium et spes*), we must insist that the fundamental sacrament is not Holy Orders, but Baptism.

- Through Baptism we are configured to Christ. We can refer to the Augustinian theology of the Total Christ (*Totus Christus*), where the Church is presented to us as the Body of Christ united to the Head and which, in their union, are the one Christ (cf. St. Augustine, *Sermon* 341,11; 137,1).
- There is no higher dignity than that of being children of God (*Final Document*, n. 21). By accepting Baptism as a basic sacrament and contemplating from it the functions and ministries in the Church, we harmoniously integrate equality and plurality, overcoming all temptations, whether pyramidal, clericalist, and power-oriented, or spherical, assembly-oriented, and uniform:

#### 3.2. People of God

- Baptism constitutes us as the People of God. The Church is the People of God; we are all the People of God (not only the laity). There is solidarity, interdependence, and participation. Let us remember that "no one is saved alone." Or "For you I am a bishop, with you I am a Christian" (St. Augustine, *Sermon* 340,1).
- That is why the ordained ministry cannot be conceived as the Levitical priesthood (taken from the people and elevated), but rather in the people, of whom it is a part and whom it serves. We must develop the dimension of service, which is what ministry means.

### 3.3. Vocations and charisms

The Church expresses the beauty of her multifaceted face (cf. St. John Paul II, *Novo millennio ineunte*, 40). From this we draw two conclusions.

- First, each person retains their personal uniqueness; it is not nullified when they cordially integrate into a community (cf. Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 235).
- And second, the synodal process does not mean invalidating the hierarchical reality of the Church. Nor are vocations (lay, priestly, religious...), charisms, or ministries nullified, but rather enhanced and interrelated. "The harmony created by the Spirit is not uniformity, and every ecclesial gift is destined for the common good" (*Final Document*, n. 26).

We have the beautiful image of the Church as *the Family of God*, from Augustine: unity in love, integration of diversity, orientation toward the common good.

## 4. Augustinian spirituality as a synodal reference point

### 4.1. Augustinian spirituality, clearly synodal.

- *Communion*. The mission of the Church is to seek and follow paths of communion, which finds its model in the mystery of the Trinity. Pope Leo XIV insists strongly on this. Augustine places the task of realizing the principle of "*anima una et cor unum in Deum*" (*Rule* 1:3) and of bearing witness to it. Communion in the Church is not presented as uniformity, but as unity in the diversity of charisms. The specific charism of each person must always be at the service of others, so that through it all may enjoy its benefits.
- *Participation*. The Church is a *communio fraternitatis*, built on a bond of brotherhood. "Thus, brothers, we see that each member, in his or her competence, performs his or her own task. [...] The functions are different, but the health is one. In the members of Christ, charity is the same as health in the members of the body" (St. Augustine, *Sermon* 162 A, 5-6). Friars, nuns, and laypeople can and must be more interrelated, collaborating more as a requirement of our charism. For example, in areas such as formation, the apostolate, and information.
- *Mission*. The Church, pilgrim in the world, is at the service of humanity as such, not simply engaging in censure or condemnation or relying on a dialectic of opposition, but communicating and witnessing to the Gospel, without limiting itself to the narrow circle of those within. In this context, Augustine's definition of the Church is valuable, that it can only be "Catholic," to the point that without this property it does not exist, much less can it be defined as the Church of Christ. For Augustine, the idea of the Church as a community is inclusive and not exclusive.

## 4.2. The Augustinians

The Augustinians, in any of the orders that make up the great Augustinian family (O.S.A., O.A.R., O.A.D., etc.), assume the spiritual heritage of the Bishop of Hippo, with whom they identify, but from their own reality within the mendicant orders created in the Late Middle Ages. This is particularly evident in the clearly synodal structures and style of government. For example, unlike monastic orders, mendicant houses are not called monasteries, but convents (from the Latin *convernire*, to gather together); the members of the Order are not called don (*dominus*, lord) but fray (*frater*, brother) the authority is not a lifelong abbot (*abbas*, father), but a prior, first among equals, with a mandate that is always temporary; the supreme structure of government is constituted by the chapters (local, provincial, and general), which are held periodically with the direct or indirect participation of the friars; profession is not made for a specific place (stability), but for the entire Order (availability and itinerancy).

It is simply a matter of living the Augustinian charism, overcoming the danger of adopting other excellent and meritorious spiritualities that differ from our charism. Before any "surname" (O.S.A., O.A.R., O.A.D.), we are Augustinians, not Benedictines or secular priests, nor members of lay movements. We are asked to know, love, and bear witness to the gift that the Spirit has raised up in us for the good of the Church, the Augustinian charism.

A particular case is the contemplative female branch, whose monasteries are a spiritual and prayerful lung, whose work and witness we deeply thank the Lord for the richness they bring. In any case, the contemplative life "has always represented in the Church and for the Church the prayerful heart, guardian of gratuitousness and rich apostolic fruitfulness, and has been a visible witness to a mysterious and multifaceted holiness" (Francis, Apostolic Constitution *Vultum Dei quaerere*, 5). It is inserted into the world as a seed of hope.

## 4.3. Model of synodality

The Augustinian orders must be models of synodality for the Church, because of the spiritual heritage of St. Augustine, because of the reality of the Order, and because of its ecclesial dimension. I would like to thank so many brothers and sisters for their work in this regard.

## 5. Recovering the vanguard of the Church

Reform is understood as recovering the initial form (re-formare), considering the origins not as a nostalgic gaze, but as an experience from the roots, from what we are.

Living our roots does not mean reducing ourselves to the usual, nor repeating it tiresomely in the same way, allowing ourselves to be carried away by material or structural securities and limited horizons. Fidelity leads us to think big, to open ourselves to newness and change, to the power of the Spirit, who one day made us leave our land and our relatives to take us to another reality (cf. Gen 12:1), and thus to witness in our daily lives and in our life to what "no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no

mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2:9). It is good to remember the story of one's own vocation. Four challenges.

### 5.1. Christological challenge:

In our vocational response, we choose total availability to let ourselves be formed and guided by the Truth, which is not an idea but a person who knows us, calls us, accompanies us, and whom we accept as the primary reference point of our existence. It is essential to:

- Recover the centrality of Christ and the experience of Christ, not as an intention, but as a reality.
- Enhance the spiritual dimension (not spiritualistic), but incarnate, made history, like the Word. It is not just about forms, but about content, experience, communion.
- Recover the entire Augustinian ecclesiology of the Total Christ and its implications.

### 5.2. Ecclesiological Challenge

*Sentire cum Ecclesia.* We cannot isolate ourselves, remain on the sidelines, thinking that we need nothing and no one. In line with what we have experienced in the synodal process, I propose to promote:

- Inter-circumscriptional relations between the different structures of the Order of Augustinian Recollects. Work more "in networks."
- Our insertion into diocesan pastoral ministry and the structures of diocesan government. Also in regard to inter-congregational relations. Enriching and being enriched: charisms are at the service of the Church.
- The Augustinian and Order sense: collaboration with the other members of your Order of Augustinian Recollects (nuns and lay people) and with the Augustinian family. How beautiful it would be if we knew how to exercise clearer leadership in the Church, that is, to express an Augustinian voice on the great issues, for example, peace.

### 5.3. The challenge of evangelization

With regard to consecrated life, we must take into account two important aspects.

- Let us not forget that the first apostolate of the consecrated person is the witness of his or her consecration as a life entirely dedicated to God, even before specific apostolic actions. It is not acceptable to lose the charism with the excuse of the apostolate. We evangelize from who we are.
- The apostolate is a response to the needs of the Church. That is why the mission asks us to "open our minds and hearts to new manifestations of the Spirit, to

discover how the call and challenges of the Spirit impel us to go beyond our preconceived ideas or notions, beyond our prejudices. [...] Today, Christ sends us out once again, as he did the 72, to continue his mission, regardless of the cost, to give our lives totally for the sake of the Kingdom" (R.F. Prevost, *Homily at the Closing Eucharist of the Intermediate General Chapter*, Manila, September 30, 2010). Augustinian religious life must always be on the move and regain a position at the forefront, also with regard to mission.

#### 5.4. Structural Challenge

- *Participation.* Augustinian religious life is participatory and co-responsible in its essence. Hence:
  - The centrality of Chapters and the regularity of their celebration. If they become a burden or a more or less annoying formality (with expressions such as "they are useless"), this is a sign that something is not right.
  - The need to listen and to involve. For example, structures for participation in parishes must exist and function. In this we should be a model for the Church; a clericalist and pyramidal Augustinian is a contradiction in terms: our style is inclusive and horizontal, in line with the ecclesiology of the People of God, the Body of Christ, and the Family of God.
- *Transparency, accountability, and evaluation.* A very important theme in the *Final Document* of the Synod is that of transparency, accountability, and evaluation. It is necessary to have structures and forms of periodic evaluation of the exercise of responsibilities of all kinds (cf. n. 100). And adequate information is necessary.

## 6. Conclusion

"Behold, I make all things new" (Rev 21:5). We are living in a *kairos*, an opportunity of grace. As I have pointed out on another occasion, in the face of the danger of pessimism, the temptation of routine, and the options of retreat, consecrated life today opens itself to hope based on the power of the Spirit, which unites us to Christ and to the Church at this moment in history. Only in this way is vocational enthusiasm, dynamic and creative witness, and cutting-edge choices possible. Only in this way are we credible.

The worst thing that can happen to us is to fall into the "sleep of the spirit," that is, to let our hearts grow numb, to anesthetize our souls, to store hope in the dark corners of disappointment, resignation, and, at times, bitterness. Despite limitations, apparent slowness, or uneven involvement, the seed that has been sown is already bearing fruit. Humility and patience are required. And trust in the Spirit, who does his work (cf. Francis, *Homily at Mass on the occasion of the 26th World Day of Consecrated Life*, February 2, 2024).

I conclude with the vibrant appeal of Leo XIV: "My beloved predecessor, Pope Francis, tirelessly urged us all to carry forward the renewal of the Church promoted by the Second Vatican Council. He continues to ask us to overcome self-referentiality, to be poorer and to listen to the poor, to intensify the bonds of communion. [...] In fact, the search for a spirituality in which prayer, work, and joy are intertwined in fidelity to everyday places and things is always new" (Leo XIV, *Address to participants in the General Chapter of the Vallombrosian Congregation of the Order of St. Benedict*, June 28, 2025).

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