Oct.20/14

***Synod Shifts to Parish, Diocesan Levels***

Mature Thinking Year long on

Debatable Family Issues - Pope

***Total transparency, away to all secrecy, enlightened Church Citizens to speak up, willing Bishops to listen, learn and dialogue at all levels, readiness to admit & correct mistakes publically by all are to be traits of Year long Reflection.***

**dr.james kottoor**

Rome Synod Extraordinary, ended without ending! It was a two-week transfiguration on mountain top in Seven Hills city. They have now come down to ground realities of scorching heat at local parish level. For what? To brood over vexing family realities at home for another year -- till October 2015 – to become more mature before taking final decisions on what they (bishops): 1. Have rejected for the moment, 2.What they have accepted with proviso and 3. What they have embraced unthinkingly, just because they were the things they always did.

One thing is logic and arithmetic of this mundane world; quite another, that of the world inside the bark of Peter in which the Nazarene takes a deep sleep like *Kumbakaranan*  least bothered by thunder and lightning, fury of winds and waves tossing up Peter’s bark to dash it on giant Rocks. Peter thou art Rock, He had said. Which rock is to crush which rock? You and I have to find the answer.

The kingdom of God has its own logic. The last will be first there, the winners end up as losers there, because it is in giving that we receive, it is in losing that we win, it is in dying that we are born to life eternal. Did these thoughts prompt a Washington Post to run the headline: **“Pope Francis and gays will win by losing this round on synod draft”?** Will they? They should, if the logic of the Gospel is to stay last and lost to come first; if the God of Francis is not a Catholic God, but a God of Surprises! So wisdom, both worldly and other worldly forbid us to open the mouth in judgment, until the juice extracted from ripe grapes crushed extraordinarily at this sitting and kept in sealed jars, is allowed to ferment for one whole year to mature with needed kick and modest sweetness for all to take a sip and dance in joy.

**Thorny Synod Topics**

What are the thorny topics we have to ponder over at parish and “Domestic Church” (family) levels to which the debate is shifted now and to which the pastors have to listen with humility to learn and grow mature? They are broken marriages, divorced relations, remarried without annulment of the earlier one, cohabiting youngsters as well as elders, gay unions, lesbian relations and all that is included in the nomenclature in abbreviation LGBT taking in four groups -- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender—all of them seeking admission to Table Fellowship (communion).

Which of these broken families are found in India? None? Who has ever done a survey? “Inter-religious marriages is problem here” says one of the three cardinals who returned from the synod. It is not clear on which survey his conclusion is based. Without conducting a Vatican ordered survey of families, Indian bishops sent their secret reports. It could have been an exercise in talking from their tops, an exercise in guess-work. Even if no data on inter-religious marriages is available, there are any amount of data gathered and sent to Rome on inter-diocesan, inter-Rite and inter-blood (pure and impure blood) marriages and complications created. They are very much discussed by Church Citizens in the Capital (Delhi Explosion), in Chennai, in Kerala and in USA. Bishops of the Indian Church refuse to take part in it. It is a forbidden topic for Catholic publications but a festive item in all websites run by Church Citizens.

Is Christ divided and broken up, is the title of the 155 page petition sent to Pope. It highlights the messy Indian Church history from the creation of Kalian Eparchy, then leapfrogging across the ocean to Chicago, Melbourne; now spreading to Faridabad and planning to plant one in Chennai etc. All these are done by diktats from above while the Rome Synod demands: ***"Bishops from all over the world will have to listen to the laity in their respective dioceses…. I expect laypersons to be protagonists who search for real solutions with their heads held high!"*** according to Bishop Bruno Forte the Synod Secretary.

So the first duty for the three Rite-based (not Jesus based) churches in India, to my mind, is to put their own houses in order first, by conducting a pew-survey of the three Rites and then acting on it to wipe out all conflicts. If one year was wasted doing nothing, there is still one more year left, to study ground realities and to make course correction to make themselves, led by Jesus, and not by their respective Rites, which is wrong.

**Migration Breaking Familiies**

Another issue that causes the break up of families is poverty leading to migration to find at least unskilled work in gulf countries, causing prolonged separation for young couples who do not have the charisma to practice celibacy which the consecrated lot claims to have but fails many. And think of marriage described as a *Sexual Sacrament of Intercourse* by an Australian couple Ron and Mavis Pirola, from Sydney with four children, one of them notably gay. Describing their 50 years of happy married life Pirola told some 200 celibate prelates: “the only feature that distinguishes our sacramental relationship from that of any other good Christ-centred relationship is sexual intimacy ….. Marriage is a sexual sacrament with its fullest expression in sexual intercourse.” He found Church teaching on sex impenetrable and when their gay son wanted to bring home his partner for Christmas, Pirola’s grand children could be satisfied with a three-word explanation: ‘He’s our son.’

The synod gave Pirolas a round of applause according to British Cardinal Nicolas for their out of box eye-popping talk. It also set off conservative critics to term it, “damaging” and “Scandalous”. This is just an example of how open the synod discussions were and what Francis wants to see taking place at parish and diocesan levels, to which unfinished Synod discussions are shifted. Possible? The concluding ordinary Synod is to take place from Oct.4 to 25, 2015. Are parish priests and diocesan bishops ready to listen and learn from talks like Australian Pirolas during this one year period?

**Pope Admits & corrects Mistakes**

Readiness to admit mistakes and correct himself in public was a remarkable trait Francis exhibited at the Synod. “Welcoming” gays into the church and giving them “fraternal space” were the objectionable phrases in the original draft... While referring to them in his concluding speech Francis said: "The task of the pope is to guarantee the unity of the church; to remind pastors that their first duty is to feed the flock -- feed the flock -- that the Lord has entrusted to them and try to search to welcome -- with fatherhood and mercy and without false fears -- the lost sheep," he said. Then, saying, "I made a mistake," Francis corrected himself: "I said welcome. Go find them!" is the correct wording.

What a great example on the part of the supreme pastor to admit that he made a mistake and equally correcting the mistake instantly and publicly. It is not the first time that Francis responds positively and quickly to reasonable critics. For instance, when he hand-picked a slate of six prelates to shape the synod’s final document, Africans objected saying none from their continent had been selected. So Francis immediately added to the list Cardinal Wilfrid F. Napier of Durban, South Africa, on Thursday.

Quite legitimate was the African criticism since Church is flourishing there. Africa fascinates both the Catholic left and right in the West, in different ways. Liberals are fond of empowering the “Third World” and hearing their voices, but that tends to end when those voices say things liberals don’t want to hear, especially on sex and family. Most of them in Africa oppose lesbian trends.

But It is to be noted, says a report, during the last century, the Catholic population of sub-Saharan Africa went from 1.9 million to more than 130 million – a staggering growth rate of 6,708 percent. Vocations are also booming across the continent. [Bigard Memorial Seminary](http://bigardmemorialseminary.com/) in south eastern Nigeria, with an enrolment of more than 1,100, is now said to be the largest Catholic seminary in the world. Compared to such abundance, what has the Syromalabar Church to boast of? It had an overflow of vocations, but we all know, it is fast declining now.

**3 Failed Topics & Transparency**

Of the original draft of 62 topics to be put to vote, only three failed to get two-thirds. They were 1. Pastoral care for gay people, 2. Communion to divorced and 3. Handling the remarried who did not obtain annulments before remarrying. These three topics did not get the traditional two-thirds majority support, that is, 122 of the 183 prelates who were present during voting. But Francis wanted both the original and corrected versions to be published to hide nothing from the Bishops to help them reflect during the one year still left to weigh the pros and cons.

According to reports “Vatican spokesman Jesuit Fr. Federico Lombardi said Saturday the pope decided to publish the synod's entire final document, including the three paragraphs without a two-thirds majority, "to ensure maximum transparency on this whole process" and to allow bishops' conferences around the world to use the document in preparation for the 2015 synod.

Calling the synod a "journey" Francis continued:"Like every walk there were moments of running fast, as if to win time and reach the goal as quickly as possible; other moments of tiredness, as if to say that's enough; other moments of enthusiasm and ardour… There were moments of profound consolation, listening to the testimony of true pastors that wisely bring in to the heart the joys and the cries of the faithful”

**Temptations on Journey**

But calling it "a journey of men," the pope said "there were also moments of desolation, of tension and of temptations, of which you could mention some possibilities." Listing those temptations, the pope began with "the temptation of the hostile rigorist."

"From the time of Jesus, it is the temptation of the zealots, of the scrupulous ... considered -- today -- 'traditionalists' and even 'intellectualists,” he said. The pope then warned against "the temptation of destructive do-Gooding, which in the name of a false mercy bands wounds and cures them without first medicating them; that treats the symptoms and not the causes and roots. It is the temptation of 'do-gooders’.. considered 'progressives' and 'liberals,'" he said.

**Three other temptations mentioned by the pope are:**

* "To transform the stone into bread to break a long fast, heavy and painful, and also to transform the bread into stone and throw it against the sinners, the weak, and the sick, namely to turn it into 'unbearable burdens;”
* "To come down from the cross, to please the people, and not to stay to fulfil the will of the father; to bow to worldly spirit rather than purify it and bend it to the Spirit of God;"
* "To neglect the 'deposit of faith,' considering us not preservers but owners and masters or, the temptation to ignore the realty, using a meticulous language and a language of polishing to say many things and to not say anything! They call them ‘Byzantineisms,’ I think these things."

The pope, described himself, not the supreme lord but “the supreme servant -- the *servus servorum Dei* [the servant of the servants of God]; the guarantor of obedience and conformity of the church to the will of God, the Gospel of Christ, and the tradition of the church,"

Concluding, the pope referred to the upcoming 2015 synod and said the bishops "now still have a year to mature, with true spiritual discernment, the proposed ideas and to find concrete solutions to many difficulties and innumerable challenges that families face." Francis was given five minutes of roaring applause by Synod fathers for his inspiring talk, Joshua McElwee and others report from Rome.

But to be down to earth what are the challenges this report demand from the Church in India, on national, Diocesan and Parish levels? It looks there are three for the consideration of responsible persons at the helm of affairs in the Church, if they are ready to follow the example of Pope Francis:

1. Practice of total transparency in Church administration by saying goodbye to all secrecy?
2. Admitting mistakes publicly, knowing well, we all, however highly or lowly placed, make mistakes and blunders knowingly or unknowingly,
3. To show courage to own up mistakes publicly (not privately) and say “I have goofed” as Francis did publicly. That is real confession, not the “sacramental one” done in secrecy.

To achieve all this what is needed at the diocesan level are outstanding Church citizens who hold their heads high to speak up clearly and fearlessly, and bishops with vision and conviction to listen to learn through dialogue until working solutions are found.

Can be contacted at: [jkottoor@asianeindia.com](mailto:jkottoor@asianeindia.com)

++++++++++++++++++++++++++++

Published in: Malayalam Daily News, New York, Joychenputhukulam, Chicago, Almayasabdam, Kerala, Matters India, Delhi, Indian Currents, Delhi,