

MAIN THEME :

SYNODALITY & SOLIDARITY OF CARITAS ASIA

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Indeed, I am immensely delighted to have this privilege of being at your service on this happy occasion of the 2026 - CARITAS ASIA REGIONAL CONFERENCE & PARTNERS FORUM at BANGKOK. Much more, having the grace of delivering the keynote address.

Let us get it: My sharing now is just a key that, I pray and hope, during the coming days, opens up if not provokes and evokes new avenues and new vistas. Also throws up, during our collective deliberations and discernments, new possibilities and feasibilities for the upcoming future of our CARITAS – ASIA & PARTNERS FORUM.

We have had, all along, a pleasant and productive journey of consolation. We have to be grateful to our God of Mission who has embraced each and every one of us as His co-partner. We now look forward to a progressive and proactive **new Strategic Framework for the next five years, 2026 – 2030**. This Bangkok - Conference, we pray, will duly be triggered by the synodal process with which Mother our Church is currently concerned.

With these introductory words, let me now proceed to present some select - highlights among many, 18 in total under 6 chosen headings.

A. SYNODAL CONTEXT

01. Sixty years after Second Vatican Council:

The synodal context was kick-started with what St. Pope John XXIII had said on 11 October 1962, the opening day of the Second Vatican Council: *'We are safe and secured within the Church. Yet, in all our humility and sincerity, we have to accept the fact that we have allowed ourselves to get suffocated within. Open the windows and doors. Let new wind and breeze come. Let new challenges come. Let us come up with a way of being the Church in the emerging Modern World'*.

Now we have travelled sixty years more, after that great Council, and it is again a grace - filled time to assess the Mission - Pilgrimage of the Church so far and plan the road map ahead. With this mind, Pope Francis convoked the 16th Synod focused on SYNODALITY. It was an ordinary synod but done in an extraordinary style.

All the baptized all over the Catholic world, numbering over 1.38 billion, were invited to 'journey together' and to 'listen to one another'. It was programmed in an inductive pattern. It was characterized by '**bottom to top**' approach. For this, it was stretched to four full years from 2021 to 2024. The central theme was coined thus: **COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION and MISSION**.

02. New Evangelization in today's world:

The present global scenario is tremendously different and terribly demanding a depth - analysis and animation of our faith convictions and commitments. It is not the Gospel that changes but it is we who are beckoned by the digitalized, privatized, liberalized context to change our understanding of Gospel for better. This should animate us to respond relevantly and radically to the signs of the time and, the signs of the space (Lk.12.54-56)

03. The Francis - Factor:

From 2013 onward, in the words of Pope Benedict, there was a fresh vitality and vigour evident in the Church once Pope Francis had taken the central stage. Francis had articulated his vision of the Church as a **battle -field hospital**. For him, the Church should be in all possible aspects a compassionate and considerate, credible and reliable Mother, embracing one and all inclusively.

Again, the Church should not be an NGO being for the poor. Instead, a Church itself has to be visibly poor and correspondingly, with the poor for their wholistic improvement and holistic advancement, in line with the Global Goals of Sustainable Development.

B SYNODAL ANALYSIS

01. Individualism causing Isolation:

We had in fact crossed the COVID - scenario. But some of the COVID – culture have rubbed our shoulders and they still linger on. One of them is individualism that continues to promote isolation. Common good in the process is challenged, paving way for selfism. Indifference to ground realities has come to be the order of the day.

Even when collectiveness is experienced, it has acquired a negative flavor of tribalism, casteism, classism, communalism, racism and what not. By the way, these were present even earlier. But currently they have begun projecting and presenting themselves as pressure - groups, procuring undue powers.

02. Geo – Economics dividing Humanity:

The corporate dynamics have pushed up the scientific and technological achievements. On the other hand, it has contributed negatively to widening the gap between the propertied and the deprived. It subtly and yet, systemically violates the human rights of the least, the lost and the last. Women and vulnerable are marginalized further. A neo colonization has set in. It controls even the democratically elected national and local governments.

03. Globalization damaging Creation:

As Pope Francis would put it in his out of the box – encyclical, released in 2015, being titled ‘Laudate Si’, a new poor has fast emerged in the recent past. That is, the creation at large. We have developed down the centuries a wrong theology of mission presenting humanity as an independent unit. We can take the cosmos for granted.

We have now challenged to go by inter-connectivity and inter-independency. Human are one more set of members of the total cosmic family. We have to ‘synodalise’ the society and cosmos. We have a God -given responsibility, not only to preserve but much more to promote the nature. We have failed miserably in this respect.

C. SYNODAL MISSION

01. Evolving a new future: Reign of the divine.

Based on the New Testamental Covenant, the Reign of the Divine has been thrown open to one and all. The pluralism and the diversity of religions, colour, gender, tribe, language and all, willed by God in His wisdom through which He has created human beings.

Mission can then be well - defined and described as being joyful witness in this pluralistic world where everyone has the right to her or his faith (Jn. 04 .23-24). We may follow myriad paths but once we reach the pick of the mountain, we discover it as the one and the only summit of the total galaxy of pilgrims.

02. A new society based on Justice:

A democratized humanity is the ultimate goal where all will a comprehensive life of the following three core - perspectives: **Equality, Liberty and Fraternity**. All will contribute to the common as per their capacities, skills and talents. All will take from common only what they need (Acts 02.42-47).

In the process, they will see to it that among them, there is no poor. There will be no ups and downs. There will be no stratification and departmentalization of the society. There will be no discrimination and differentiation. Divisions are dismissed. Instead, Justice prevails. Harmony presents. Solidarity succeeds.

03. A new cosmos based on Justice:

The book of Revelation has come to be the end - book of the total Bible since it highlights the ‘Omega Point’: A New Earth and A New Heaven, promoted and preserved by A New Society. ‘Everything is made anew (Rev. 21.01- 05). That is our destination.

Our synodal pilgrimage is not for itself but for this socio - cosmic transformation. In the words of our present Pope Leo, a Mission of Liberation for one and all, including the creation. A new just cosmos underlines the following three key - dimensions: Beauty, Quality and Integrity.

D. SYNODAL SYNERGY

01. Ecumenical people of God:

We know that the year 2025 was also the 1700th anniversary of the first Council of the undivided ecclesial community held at Nisea in 325. Pope Francis had brought this historical phenomenon to our attention when he led us through the synodal journey.

Accordingly, he programmed the Roman Synod as an ecumenical one which was started with a 3 day - ecumenical retreat for the delegates. He had suggested that the next synod in 2028 could be an ecumenical synod when we all the baptized, though belonging to varied churches and denominations, could come together to work out and chalk out certain collective ventures for the one mission that we all share, in the Spirit, with the God of Jesus.

Baptism is our first and best ID - card. While that is the original and foundational identity, all other identities are additional.

02. All faiths, cultures and revelations:

This invites us to spread our tent and thus, enlarge the space of our tent (Is. 54.02). We no longer live with the concept, declaring thus: 'no salvation outside the church'. Who are we to control the God of Mission who is left to Himself, boundary-less? He is magnanimously inclusive (Jn 4.07-26). He is Father and Mother of one and all (Lk.11. 01 to 04).

This was amply highlighted by the Second Vatican Council which had articulated that all revelations contain and thus refer to the One Ultimate Being. Consequently, inter- faith reach out has come to be a non - negotiable element of all the mission enterprises in our multi - religious, multi- ethnic and multi- cultural context of Asia. What we want is not uniformity, but unity in diversity. Societal pluriformity is a beauty, indeed.

03. People of Good Will :

Now we move further to embrace and include 'even those who may not believe in any form and name of the divinity. They may even pooh-pooh religions as such. But they have a commendable good - will to participate in the societal and cosmic process, in their given big or small context. Also, they avail themselves to contribute, again in big or small way, their efforts to reform as well as transform the humanity.

They will to go by humanized ecology. They stand for human rights and are ready to raise their voice for truth. They are the people of good will (Lk. 02 .13-14). In the networking process, we have to engage with them in all synodal synergy.

E. SYNODAL SPIRITUALITY

01. Optimism:

Hope disappoints us not (Rom 05. 05). We remember here the focal concern of the last year's Jubilee - 2025. We are called to be 'missioners of hope even in a hopeless and helpless situation'. Synod is only a seed, amidst weeds, but it will grow to yield fruits. This optimistic attitude and positive approach could and should become our lived spirituality.

We should accordingly develop a **sense of sensitivity** towards those who may differ. We can be grateful to them for challenging us and thus, correcting us when we tend to go wrong. We need '**check points and check persons.**' We, in the process manifest that the mission is 'already but not yet'. This eschatological spirituality will ever help us to keep going and also, keep growing.

02. Dynamism:

The synodal process calls for a definitive openness to change for better. No change, no growth. No growth, no future. In other words, without spontaneity and creativity, synodality will not last long. That demands us with dynamism. We may have to put on Jesus, as St Paul would say, so that we become immensely active. Much more, proactive.

Having the mind of Jesus (Phil.2.5), we then labour for a sunnier tomorrow. We not only assess the present but much more, animate ourselves and eventually others for a future that will be coloured and characterized by justice.

03. Enthusiasm:

The basic meaning of this term is '**God-in-us**'. With God's grace, nothing is impossible (Lk.01.37). This spirituality- aspect renders an invitation to '**dream big, do big, in one's given small place**'. Boldness then evolves. Search emerges. Spirit blows where it wills (Jn.03.08). In the synodal journey of life, process is more important for progress. No process, no progress. One can even venture to say that the synodal process as such should become unstoppable.

F. SYNODAL CARITAS – SOLIDARITY

01. We travel together with 3 Ds:

This touches our service sphere of **CARITAS -ASIA**, referring to our hands of solidarity. The synodal service-scheme calls us to proceed with a dynamic circularity of Decentralizing, Delegating, Democratizing. As a **CARITAS - FAMILY**, this circularity begins at home, among us. In due course of time, it snowballs. We can be pretty sure that our services then will be surpassing our expectation and transcending our calculation. In the words of Jesus, the fruits will go ahead eventually to touch a hundredfold.

A shared - responsibility will indeed be immensely productive since it functions commendably with a win - win attitude. Our variety of gifts, skills and charisms will be graciously and generously placed at the service of our stockholders.

02. We sharpen the saw:

This refers to the priority - people that we need to serve first and foremost. With them, our hearts should beat. In the words of Pope Francis, '**the peripheries**'. A continental conference like this can apply its mind to sharpen the saw, identifying '**cumulatively suppressed people.**' In simple words, the **poorest of the poor.**

An example will assist us to obtain the depth of this concern: Women are by and large sidelined

and marginalized. The sharpening of saw gives us an emphatic call to identify analytically the more, if not the **most downtrodden among women**. Doubly and thus, **cumulatively dehumanized women**. They may be, in the given sickening and saddening situation, **migrant women, single mothers, sexually assaulted, abandoned rural, illiterate women and the like**. This principle can be applicable to any section of the society in any living scenario. Pope Francis pushed this point further by referring to **'not only sociological but also, geographical peripheries.'** In fine, this approach requires **'discernment-in-common' to recognize the neediest among the needy.**

03. We walk the talk as a Caritas – Family:

This touches each of us. We have to become the change-makers and growth- engineers'. In our heads, we need to a definitive clarity thus : We have to become the very change that we propose to others, in the words of Mahatma Gandhiji. We give a visible witness, in and through our personal, familial and collective lives, to our synodal mission of birthing a new just humanity and a new just cosmos.

We walk the talk. No doubt, the synodal walking together will be tiring and yet, evangelical joy together (Mt.05.12). We have to become a body sufficiently mature spiritually as well as socio - cosmically, developed to be capable of **'dialoguing, discerning, deciding and dedicating'**.

We thus become a socio cosmic prophecy and advocacy. We courageously and constantly dream ever new paths in our political and ecological spheres. We are ready to dirty our fingers and soil our clothes to make the society and creation better and brighter. **TO BE SYNODAL means BE POSITIVE, BE PROACTIVE, BE PRODUCTIVE..!**

Before ending my presentation, I wish to register my profound gratitude for providing me with this opportunity of service of sharing some lead - thoughts at the start of this august CARITAS ASIA REGIONAL CONFERENCE & PARTNERS FORUM - 2026.

Prayerfully let me propose: **IF NOT NOW, THEN WHEN..? IF NOT HERE, THEN WHERE..? IF NOT WE, THEN FOR WHO..? IF NOT FOR GOD'S MISSION, THEN FOR WHAT..?**

----- **MAY GOD BLESS US, CARITAS ASIA & PARTNERS FORUM.....**