

**BACKGROUND AND REFLECTIONS ON THE 2015 SYNOD**  
**(ABOUT POPE FRANCIS FOR PEOPLE IN THE PEW)**  
**PART 8 APPENDIX – WHAT HAPPENED AT THE 2015 SYNOD?**

**Introduction**

Welcome to the study of the 2015 Ordinary Synod of the Bishops on the Family (today)!

This is a very important Synod which will affect the future, our future, and so we need to know a lot about it. Thus, we will take our time in looking at it and not rush through our study too quickly. And I will try to be thorough so that your understanding of it will be good. At the opening of the Synod, John L. Allen, Junior, who is an excellent scholarly observer of the Vatican and on whom we will rely heavily wrote: “The October 4-25 summit of prelates from around the world is a critically important moment for the pontiff, one he has been building toward for more than a year. If past is prologue [and it is!], however, he may face a stiff challenge in steering it toward his desired outcome.” (Allen) And this Synod’s work, recommendations, fall-out, and consequences will be with us for a long time! The Church is going to be different from now on!

We can catch the rhythm of this Synod if we look at its unfolding on a time basis (as we might do regarding some event in our diary) and so at times we will look at it on a day-to-day basis and at other times in a week-to week basis; this gives us a clear path for observing what the Synod did and accomplished. Also I will do my best to avoid technicalities and technical language which might bog us down; the aim here is to make our understanding as full as possible without getting lost in language.

Of course, there will be some overlap with what we considered earlier because this is inevitable and because this is the only way to achieve continuity in what we know. And do remember also that repetition is often the mother of all learning. In looking at this new material, please use all you have learned about the Synod up to this point (from the earlier portions of these comments/reflections and from other sources that were available to you).

And as you move along, please pray as well. The major point here is for the Church to be a better Church for the Modern World (Pope Francis’ desire, hope, and inspiration). Prayer to the Holy Spirit of the Risen One is always good prayer! In addition, as you move along, develop your own evaluation of what is happening and has happened (in regard to the Synod) – develop your pluses and blessings and criticisms, etc. Do not be afraid to think for yourself in the Holy Spirit. Pope Francis was very concerned that the Synod be a place where the participants could express themselves freely in the Spirit; I am sure he would want this same thing for each and all of us! Moreover, discuss what you are thinking with others because that is the way our Church will grow in its being and Faith.

Please feel very free to share any and all of these materials with others; the whole point is for each and all of us to have a conversion of the heart in respect to evangelization, the welfare of our families, and the inclusive gathering and welcoming of those who are at the margins of our Church. If the Spirit moves you, set up a study group, e.g., in your parish or community using these materials that you have received and will continue to receive and any other resources to which you have access. VIS (Vatican Information Service) is an excellent source in this regard; there are several links available for you including [www.news.va/en/source/vatican-information-service](http://www.news.va/en/source/vatican-information-service) and [visnews-en@mlists.vatican.va](mailto:visnews-en@mlists.vatican.va)

**The Pre-Synod Time**

This is the time more or less immediately preceding the Synod itself. It is worth looking at this because it gives us the background and context and situation as the Synod was about ready to begin.

Children (in families) have been a major component emphasized by the Pope in his thinking about the modern family and so this is important. Bishop Mark Davies of England has stated that the

Church has failed to teach children about Catholic marriage. “Children do not understand that marriage is a ‘divine vocation,’ the Bishop of Shrewsbury [England] said at a Mass for grandparents. Speaking ahead of the Synod on the Family in Rome, Bishop Davies said many young people had been failed by what amounted to a lack of catechesis. Many did not realise, he said, that marriage is a divine vocation, not a human invention that changed with the views of passing generations. ‘We share a deep concern for the many victims of this confusion, not least the children,’ he said at Shrewsbury Cathedral. ‘The vision of marriage as a divine vocation for their own happiness and salvation and that of children has been allowed to fade.’ His words come as the Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales prepares to release new guidelines about Marriage Preparation. It is understood that the guidelines have been approved but will not be released until after the Synod on the Family concludes.” (Rose Campbell, reporter and writer for The Tablet, an excellent theological/religious magazine run by laity in Great Britain).

At roughly the same time, it was stated that the Synod needs to stress the importance of strong fathers. “A popular American clinical psychologist and author [Doctor Ray Guarendi, author, and father of ten adopted children] told an Ottawa audience he hopes bishops attending this month’s [October’s] Synod on the Family in Rome will address the importance of strong fathers in the family” (Deborah Gyapong of Canadian Catholic News writing in The Catholic Register).

“I think they need to emphasize dads taking a much more faithful leadership role. We guys have a tendency to leave it up to the women, and everything says and the research concludes that a strong male figure is something very needed for the development of boys and girls ... [Guarendi stressed] the importance of parents’ taking authority in the home. Children view us as someone they can challenge.” (Guarendi)

Doctor Guarendi also had some observations on what the Synod’s work was. “I think so often in the history of the church, we have seen they have had to speak about things that used to be taken for granted. Now they have to reinforce it and people are thinking they are going to come up with something new. No, they are simply saying, well, given certain societal movements, we had better reinforce this ... Those who expect Pope Francis to make some dramatic changes in Catholic moral teaching are going to be greatly disappointed. As he has said, he is a son of the Church. People confuse his pastoral style with a view that the Church needs to alter itself. You take a complete Pope Francis and that is not the way it is.” (Guarendi)

One other need pops up here because we all know that there are several marriages authorized by the Church that are simply failing and not working. The persons involved are still members of our Catholic family and so how can we ignore their plight? Certainly Jesus would not do so! And “the current situation has led many couples to ignore Church teaching and go on with their lives” (Benedict Thomas, author of a letter to the editor of The Catholic Register). Unfortunately many do leave the Church and this is why the Pope wants to show them mercy!

TO BE CONTINUED

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