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Pope Francis meets with Jesuits working in Canada during a meeting at the archbishop's resid

Pope Francis meets with Jesuits working in Canada during a meeting at the archbishop's residence in Quebec July 29, 2022. At right is Cardinal Michael Czerny, prefect of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

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The unity of the Catholic Church's bishops is fundamental in correcting past wrongs and in confronting challenges today, Pope Francis said.

Meeting with a group of Jesuits in Canada July 29, the pope said his visit was made possible by the unity of the country's bishops in seeking reconciliation with Indigenous peoples who experienced abuse or attempts at forced assimilation at church-run residential schools.

"When an episcopate is united, then it can deal with the challenges that arise," the pope told his Jesuit confreres. "If everything is going well, it is not because of my visit. I am just the icing on the cake. It is the bishops who have done everything with

their unity."

The pope met with 15 Jesuits from Canada during his July 24-29 visit to the country. As has become the practice when the pope meets Jesuits during a foreign trip, a transcript of his remarks was released later by the Jesuit journal La Civiltà Cattolica.

According to the transcript of the meeting, published Aug. 4, the pope said that while he witnessed the "familiarity between the bishops and Indigenous peoples," there are still "some who work against healing and reconciliation."

"Even last night," the pope recalled, "I saw a small traditionalist group protesting and saying that the church is something else; but that is the way things are. I only know that one of the worst enemies against the unity of the church and of the episcopates is ideology."

Touching upon the themes of the pope's visit, particularly reconciliation and listening, a Jesuit asked Francis if his experience in Canada shaped "your synodal vision of the church."

The pope said he was "bothered" by the use of "the adjective 'synodal' as if it were the latest quick fix for the church."

"When one says 'synodal church,' the expression is redundant: the church is either synodal or it is not church. That is why we have come to a synod on synodality, to reiterate this," he said.

The pope reiterated that the synod "is not a political meeting nor a committee for parliamentary decisions" but rather an "expression of the church where the protagonist is the Holy Spirit."

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He also warned that Christians risk "losing the overall picture, the sense of things" if a synod is reduced to focusing on singular issues. Recalling the 2015 Synod of Bishops on the family, the pope said some erroneously believed that "it was organized to give Communion to remarried divorcees."

Nevertheless, he said, his postsynodal exhortation, "Amoris Laetitia," only addressed that specific issue in a footnote "because all the rest are reflections on the theme of

the family, such as that on the family catechumenate."

"There is so much richness," the pope said. "One cannot squeeze it all into the funnel of a single issue. I repeat, if the church is church, then it is synodal. It has been so from the beginning."

Francis also spoke about the fact he did not meet with victims of sexual abuse during his visit to Canada. Apart from scheduling issues, the pope said he also wanted to focus his visit on the Indigenous people.

"Many people responded to me saying that they understood that this was not an exclusion at all," he said.

Lastly, a Jesuit asked the pope regarding the debates surrounding the liturgy and its importance in formation.

The pope noted that when "there is conflict, the liturgy is always mistreated."

"In Latin America 30 years ago, there were monstrous liturgical deformations. Then they moved to the opposite side with a backward-looking intoxication with the old. A division was established in the church," he explained.

The pope said his actions, including his recent apostolic letter "Traditionis Custodes" ("Guardians of the Tradition"), "aimed to follow the line taken by St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI, who had allowed the ancient rite and had asked for subsequent verification."

"Traditionis Custodes," Francis said, "made it clear that there was a need to regulate the practice, and above all to avoid it becoming a matter, let us say, of 'fashion' and remaining instead a pastoral question."