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Pope Francis prays while holding a crosier during Mass in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Oc

Pope Francis prays while holding a crosier during Mass in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican Oct. 29, 2023, marking the conclusion of the first session of the Synod of Bishops on synodality. (CNS photo/Vatican Media)

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Rome — October 29, 2023
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To reform the church is to put God first and adore him, and to love and serve others, Pope Francis said at Mass marking the conclusion of the first session of the Synod of Bishops on synodality.

"This is the church we are called to 'dream': a church that is the servant of all, the servant of the least of our brothers and sisters; a church that never demands an attestation of 'good behavior,' but welcomes, serves, loves, forgives; a church with open doors that is a haven of mercy," he said.

"We may have plenty of good ideas on how to reform the church, but let's remember: to adore God and to love our brothers and sisters with his love, that is the great and perennial reform," the pope said in his homily at Mass in St. Peter's

Basilica Oct. 29.

Thousands of faithful stood at the start of Mass as synod members and participants processed into the basilica. The procession was led by non-ordained members followed by bishops and then cardinals. The synod on synodality marked the first time laypeople and women religious could take part as voting members. Of the total 364 members, close to 25% were "non-bishop members" and 54 of them were women.

"Dear friends, the general assembly of the synod has now concluded," the pope said in his homily. "Today we do not see the full fruit of this process, but with farsightedness we look to the horizon opening up before us."

"The Lord will guide us and help us to be a more synodal and missionary church, a church that adores God and serves the women and men of our time, going forth to bring to everyone the consoling joy of the Gospel," he said.

As the church concludes this stage of its journey, he said, "it is important to look at the 'principle and foundation' from which everything begins ever anew: love.

"Loving God with our whole life and loving our neighbors as ourselves," he said, is "the heart of everything."

The way to channel this love is to adore God and serve one another, he said.

"We have lost the habit of adoration," the pope said, calling on all priests, dioceses, parishes and communities to "return to worship" and adore the Lord. "Only in his presence will we be purified, transformed and renewed by the fire of his Spirit."

To adore God means "to acknowledge in faith that he alone is Lord and that our individual lives, the church's pilgrim way and the ultimate outcome of history all depend on the tenderness of his love. He gives meaning to our lives," he said.

"We are always at risk of thinking that we can 'control God,' that we can confine his love to our own agenda. Instead, the way he acts is always unpredictable and consequently demands amazement and adoration," Pope Francis said. The path of idolatry is "wanting the Lord to act according to the image we have of him."

He said the church needs to be "a worshiping church and a church of service, washing the feet of wounded humanity, accompanying those who are frail, weak and cast aside, going out lovingly to encounter the poor," as God commanded.

"It is a grave sin to exploit the vulnerable, a grave sin that corrodes fraternity and devastates society," he said, and, "as disciples of Jesus, we desire to bring to the world a different type of leaven, that of the Gospel."

Quoting St. John Chrysostom, he said that those who are merciful are like a safe harbor to those in need, so "when you see a man suffering shipwreck on land through poverty, do not sit in judgment on him, nor require explanations, but relieve his distress."

Later in the day, before praying the midday Angelus, the pope again reflected on the Lord's command to love God and neighbor.

He held up the example of St. Teresa of Kolkata as someone "who was so little," but was still able "to do so much good — by reflecting God's love like a drop" of clear water.

"If at times, looking at her and other saints, we might be moved to think that they are heroes that cannot be imitated, let us think again about that small drop," which reflects love and "can change many things," he said.

"How?" the pope asked. By taking the first step to love and serve those in need without waiting for others to act, even though this is not easy to do.

This story appears in the **Synod on Synodality** feature series. View the full series.