



Ecumenical Vigil of Prayer

Saturday 30 September 2023

St. Peter's Square, 5-7 pm

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Why an Ecumenical Vigil?

The aim of the Ecumenical Vigil of Prayer is:

- to underline the centrality of prayer in the synodal process, which is a spiritual process.
- to underline the articulation between the synodal path and the ecumenical path, which all the documents of the synodal path have highlighted. Synodality and ecumenism are two paths to be travelled together. The commitment to build a synodal Church has several ecumenical implications (cf *Instrumentum Laboris* B1)
- to underline the key theme of commitment to unity and peace in this world torn apart by so many divisions.
- to give a strong sign of the importance of prayer for the unity of the baptised in Christ, and to entrust the work of the Synod together to the Holy Spirit.

This time of prayer stems from a dream expressed by Brother Alois, Prior of Taizé, at the opening of the Synod on 9 October 2021. The idea proposed by the Taizé Community was shared and discussed with those in charge of the General Secretariat of the Synod and with those of the Dicastery for Christian Unity, who proposed organising it on the eve of the opening of the Synod. The project was then proposed to Pope Francis, who decided to preside over it on the eve of the Synod. All participants in the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops were asked to attend the vigil as a time of preparation for the Assembly. The announcement by Pope Francis was made after the Angelus on 15 January, during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity:

“The path to Christian unity and the path of synodal conversion of the Church are linked. I would like to take this opportunity to announce that on Saturday 30 September, an ecumenical prayer vigil will be held on St. Peter’s Square, with which we will entrust the work of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. For the young people coming to the vigil, there will be a special programme throughout that weekend, entrusted to the Taizé community. As of now, I invite brothers and sisters of all Christian denominations to participate in this “Gathering of the People of God.”

How is the vigil being prepared?

The preparation of the vigil was a real exercise in synodality, involving a large number of partners, with the desire from the beginning to involve all those ecumenical communities and movements committed to the search for unity. The preparation for this prayer vigil was part of the broader preparations for 'Together | Gathering of the People of God', which also involved delegates from all the Christian Churches present in Rome, as well as many youth ministry leaders from the European Churches.

The Programme

Open to all the People of God, this common prayer will include listening to the Word of God, praise and intercession, Taizé songs and silence – a strong sign of fraternity, unity and peace.

14:30 | Arrival of people from Rome in St. Peter's Square. They will be welcomed in "Piazza aperta" (free entry) mode without a ticket.

A prayer booklet with readings, songs and a QR code will be handed out.

There will be space for people with reduced mobility or in wheelchairs in a special section.

Songs from different continents welcome participants to the square in a joyful and prayerful atmosphere, alternating between a Ukrainian choir, a Congolese choir, a Nigerian choir, a Serbian choir and a Latin American choir.

16:00 | Coming from Saint John Lateran, the participants of Together will join two reserved areas (reparti).

16:30 | Around forty young people from different continents, life situations, and different church traditions carrying a Bible with representatives of the local Roman churches together with the various "Together" partners gather around the obelisk. They ascend in procession to the *sacrato*.

16:40 | The procession moves into the *sacrato*. Church leaders, young people and people living in precarious conditions sit to the right and left, facing the San Damiano cross in the *sacrato*, with a Bible and an icon of the Virgin Mary beside them. A garden with flowers is set up on the steps. Trees and shrubs are in front of the façade of the basilica.

17:00-18:00 | **Pre-Vigil – Four expressions of thanksgiving**, interspersed with songs, for the gifts God gives us and the responsibility that follows. After each talk, testimonies are presented.

Thanksgiving for the gift of unity and the synodal journey.

Three young people from different church backgrounds and continents recall the synodal journey.

Ukrainian song (prayer) by the choir of Santa Sofia Church in Rome.

Thanksgiving for the gift of the other

Fifteen people mime the story of the Good Samaritan.

African song by a Nigerian choir from Rome.

Thanksgiving for the gift of peace

Two refugees recount their journey and speak of the hope of a good life, of the courage of those who leave their country, running the risks, and of gratitude to those who welcome them.

Canticle of Creatures by St Francis, sung by a soloist.

Thanksgiving for the gift of Creation

Some images projected on screens and listening to the sounds of nature (wind, sea, birds, animals ...) accompanied by words from the encyclical *Laudato Si'*...

Singing by an Orthodox choir

18:00-19:10 | **Ecumenical Prayer Vigil**

Introduction by **Pope Francis**

Opening prayer by **Patriarch Bartholomew**

First Reading: Ephesians 4:1-7

Verses from Psalm 104 (of Creation) sung in various languages by soloists, interspersed with an Alleluia sung by all

Gospel Mt 5:1-12

Hymn: *Dona la pace, Signore*

Silence [8 min]

Intercessions

For each intercession, an introductory sentence is read by a Church leader, followed by the prayer intention of a fraternal delegate to the Synod. A young man and woman, carrying candles, accompany each intercessor.

Hymn: *Bénissez le Seigneur* (Song of Daniel)

Our Father, introduced by the **Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby**

Hymn: *Magnificat III*

Words of Pope Francis

The twelve Church Leaders receive some seeds in a bag given by the representatives of the four groups who made the presentations before the vigil, as a sign of the seeds of unity/synodality to plant at home and make grow (with reference to 1 Cor 3:6 "I planted, Apollo watered, but God made it grow").

Concluding prayer by Pope Francis and all twelve Church leaders, addressed to the Synod participants and all others. The booklet reads "Please rise for the concluding prayer" in English and Italian.

The Church leaders give the blessing together with the Pope.

During the song *Adoramus te o Christe*, Pope Francis gathers in prayer for a moment with the Heads of the other Churches in front of the cross, to express that Christ unites us through the gift of his life. Following this, the Holy Father and Heads of the Churches leave.

Final hymn: *Tu Sei Sorgente Viva* to invoke the Holy Spirit on the Synod participants, who leave the parvis of St Peter's Square with the ecumenical representatives, and go to dinner in Paul VI Hall.

Access

Access to the Ecumenical Prayer Vigil is free. It is therefore not necessary to have a ticket.

The Adsumus Prayer: a new composition of the Taizé community

The Ecumenical Prayer Vigil in St Peter's Square will begin with the words "*Adsumus, Sancte Spiritus, veni a nos, adesto nobis*": "*We are here before you, Holy Spirit, come to us, dwell in our hearts*".

This prayer is attributed to St Isidore of Seville (c. 560 - 4 April 636) and has a long history: used at various Councils, Synods and other meetings throughout the history of the Church, in modern times these words have been recited at the beginning of every session of the Second Vatican Council.

Offered to all the faithful by the secretariat of the Synod, in a version translated into several languages also available online, this prayer will be sung and then read at the opening of the vigil by **Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew**.

For the occasion, the Taizé community has created a new composition consisting of a relatively short refrain that will be taken up by all present, in Latin. On this refrain, soloists will sing the full text of the prayer in Italian, English and French, enabling all those gathered in St Peter's Square or elsewhere in communion with this event to stand together in the presence of the living God and to invoke the Holy Spirit for the Church and the work of the Synod. The song, in a meditative and repetitive style, was composed especially for the occasion with the intention of giving everyone the opportunity to internalise the words of this beautiful prayer.

The Decoration of St Peter's Square

Two key elements will characterise the setting up of St Peter's Square for the Ecumenical Prayer Vigil. These are the San Damiano crucifix (dear to St Francis of Assisi) and the floral and shrub decoration, symbolising creation and the respect due to it.

The San Damiano crucifix

It was in front of this crucifix, representing Christ on the cross, that St Francis felt called upon: "Francis, go and repair my house..". It was 1205 and the Poverello had come to pray in the little chapel dedicated to San Damiano, on the outskirts of Assisi.

This cross is a milestone in the conversion of the saint of Assisi who, during his life, contributed to the renewal of the Church. Today, this world-famous icon can be found in the Basilica of St Clare in Assisi.

The cross of San Damiano will be installed in the centre of the square with, on one side, a Bible – the book of the Word of God enthroned at the opening of every synod – and on the other the icon of the Virgin Mary 'Maria Salus populi romani', the original of which is in Santa Maria Maggiore. Olive trees will be placed behind the crucifix.

Arrangement of flowers and trees

A few days before the close of the Season of Creation, on 4 October (feast of St Francis of Assisi), the *sagrato* in front of St Peter's Basilica will be decorated with flowers, trees and shrubs, an invitation to rekindle a sense of wonder and gratitude for the gift of creation.

Today, all living beings and the whole of creation can be endangered by human activity. The synod process, which invites us to put the most vulnerable at the centre, reminds us of our responsibility to the human family and commits us to extend the protection of vulnerable entities to the whole of creation.

In this spirit, the plant and floral decoration will evoke a garden close to nature. Pope John XXIII said: 'We do not want to be like the guardians of a museum, but to become gardeners to help things grow'.

In particular there will be:

- Mediterranean trees (cypresses, cedars, etc.) 6 metres tall will be placed in front of the atrium of the Basilica. A passageway will be left free in the centre to allow the Holy Father and the heads of the Churches access to the *sagrato*.
- An avenue made up of two 120 cm high hedges (shrubs, potted flowers, etc.) will lead from the obelisk to the *parvis*, evoking the river of life flowing from the side of the crucified Jesus. This route will be used by the procession of Church Leaders and representatives of the People of God, which will leave the obelisk at 4.40pm.
- Potted flowers (cyclamens) will be placed on the steps leading down from the square towards the statues of St Peter and St Paul.

The trees and shrubs will be offered by **Confagricultura**, an association of Italian agricultural producers (see the attached note in Italian).

The potted flowers will come from the Netherlands. On the initiative of the Dutch Ambassador to the Holy See, **Johanna Gerarda Maria Ruigrok**, the flowers are sponsored by a media group and supplied by an association of Dutch growers

Together in the world

Not everyone will be able to travel to Rome for the Together gathering. Therefore, in different parts of the world, prayer vigils, large and small, in towns and villages, will be organised on or around September 30 as a sign of communion with those gathered in Rome and to pray for the XVI General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. A world map with a list of the various initiatives planned so far is available on the website <https://together2023.net/events-map/>

Contact for the Press

Journalists wishing to cover the Ecumenical Prayer Vigil are kindly requested to apply for accreditation at the Holy See Press Office through the Online Accreditation System at: press.vatican.va/accreditamenti. Requests for interviews with representatives of the Churches and Christian communities should be addressed to this address: sinodo@salastampa.va.

QR code for attached files (including the list of Church leaders)

