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## **Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean. Lopez (Listening Committee Coordinator): "The Church manifests her presence, but she also calls for the living testimony of the People of God"**

"We are all missionary disciples going forth" it is the theme of the [Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean](#), to be held in Mexico City from November 21st to 28th, with limited in-person attendance and additional online presence from across the continent. It will be a "historic" event in many ways, characterised by widespread consultation and participation by all the People of God. It can be described as the first major ecclesial event of the Covid era, the result of a working method already experienced during the Amazon Synod, as well as a "foretaste" of the Synod of Bishops on synodality. Although 14 years have gone by since the last General Conference of the Latin American Bishops' Conference in Aparecida, *it will not be a new General Conference, but an ecclesial Assembly (with bishops, priests, religious and lay faithful) with the aim of resuming and giving renewed topical relevance to the Aparecida mandate*. It thus responds to a recommendation by Pope Francis, who asked that the Assembly be held "with the entire People of God, without exception." And this is what is happening. The great attention given to the process of listening in preparation for the Assembly, and which has just ended, is impressive, despite the restrictions imposed by the pandemic. "There can be no synodality without a listening process", **Mauricio López**, lay coordinator of the Listening Committee on behalf of CELAM, a leading player in the Amazon Synod as REPAM executive secretary, told SIR. He is the person in charge of coordinating this listening phase. **How has the listening process developed with regard to the Ecclesial Assembly? Is it meeting the expected objectives?** It must be said, first of all, that it all started with the Pope's request for an authentic ecclesial process, in a broad sense, with no exclusion. The listening process was conceived precisely to guarantee the widest possible participation of the People of God. And I can confirm that the listening phase was in fact characterised by reciprocity. *The Church manifests her presence, but she also calls for the living testimony of the People of God, in its sensus fidei. The People of God provide an essential contribution to this journey.* Listening can only be authentic and fruitful with the broad participation of the People of God, of the lay faithful, of those who are marginalised, those living in the peripheries. We have extended the listening phase by two months, mindful of the needs of the faithful to organise and receive adequate information. The Listening Commission alone has arranged over three hundred information and animation meetings with parishes, dioceses, Episcopal conferences and religious congregations. **It's a way of experiencing an ecclesial event on a large scale...** In its preparatory phase, this assembly faces a number of challenges, starting with the actual organisation of the event, which is being prepared in a simple way, with no significant financial commitment. Approximately one thousand delegates will participate remotely, from the places where they live. *A very important lesson can be drawn from this method. In fact we are seeing a vibrant process enabling the participation of the whole continent, with a limited environmental, as well as financial, impact, which fosters the communion of goods.* **What are the cries, the requests that are coming from the People of God who inhabit the Continent?** The [Aparecida Document](#), which is a reference point, sets out clear challenges that are not only pastoral in nature. On top of that we have the current situation, especially with regard to the pandemic.

### **The cries reflect the socio-cultural situation.**

The ongoing pandemic is interpreted as the sign of a change of era, it has unveiled other epidemics and other challenges, ranging from the impoverishment of large population segments, to the shortcomings of the public health system, to a social model that is detrimental to the human person

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as a result of the throw-away culture. I must also mention the cry of the earth, whose exploitation is reaching the point of no return, increased violence in society, in families, in institutional and political spheres, the educational gap, the issue of migrants and human trafficking, new aspects of migration and xenophobia, concern for indigenous and Afro peoples. We face the challenge of interculturality and of living together as full citizens. We witness the new opportunities of global social communication, but also the impact of incomplete information in the context of post-truth communication. Furthermore, at the ecclesial level we are witnessing rising secularisation coupled by the growing fragmentation of religious experiences and the growth of Pentecostal Churches, along with the so-called theology of prosperity, which disrupts the perspective of solidarity that we consider essential, starting with the Social Doctrine. The pastoral care of large cities is also a challenge. And then young people, women and their participation in the Church and in society, the painful scourge of sexual abuse in the Church, clericalism, the challenge of new ministries. **What is the connection between listening and synodality?** It can be said that listening is the fundamental element, not so much a connecting factor, *There can be no synodality without listening, without full, mutual listening involving the entire People of God, as set out in the Second Vatican Council.* Pope Francis' Apostolic Constitution [Episcopalis Communio](#) makes a very strong case for this, stating that every synodal process must begin and culminate with the people of God. How can the participation of the people be put into practice? By listening! This document of the Pope's, unfortunately not widely known, highlights the importance of asking the Holy Spirit for the gift of listening, to listen with God to the cries of the people, and at the same time to be present among the people, and to find the presence of the Holy Spirit in the people and in their cries. *Indeed, there can be no synodality without listening, but the latter must be based on discernment, not on one-way, ideological ways of listening.* **A similar path, with extensive consultation, was followed for the Amazon Synod. Two years have passed: what is the outcome of that approach?** The Amazon Synod was first and foremost the fruit of a long ecclesial process, of a pilgrim Church, an incarnated, prophetic and even a martyr Church. It was no coincidence that the Pope referred to the Amazon region as a "biome" and as a place for intercultural encounter, as a place for theology, but also as a place for pastoral experience to help the entire Church in her reflection on synodality. In this context, I believe that the greatest achievement of the Synod was to embrace a territorial dimension that had no previous formal recognition inside the Church. *It marked an irreversible way of proceeding, of listening to the People of God, of creating specific structures to respond to the calls for internal conversion.* The Amazon Synod has led to the active involvement of the Church in this region; it has strengthened the ties with the native communities and peoples. In practical terms, it set into motion new structures, such as CEAMA, the new Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Conference, as well as complex issues such as ministries, the possibility of an Amazonian rite, and the permanent diaconate. Clearly, the entire debate has moved beyond issues specifically pertaining to the Pan-Amazon region. **Can this listening process also send out an important message to the Church as a whole and to the next Synod of Bishops, which will be focused on synodality?** *The Ecclesial Assembly process is already organically linked to the Synod on synodality.* We noted that there is a convergence of views, starting from the Magisterium of the Pope. In concrete terms, three members of the CELAM Commissions are members of the Theological Commission of the Synod, and I myself am the Latin American member of the Methodological Commission. In addition to this, in meetings with Cardinal Grech and his collaborators, we have been asked to share our Latin American experience, our methodology, what we have learned. Even though our experience is not perfect, we too are in a learning process... But it seems that our experience, with humility, is significant in the experience of this Synod. \*journalist, "Il giornale del popolo"

Bruno Desidera\*