

Dear friends,

From Rome, where we are experiencing particularly intense and emotional days, I come to greet you. As the whole world gathers in Rome in contemplation and prayer to accompany our dear Pope Francis to his final resting place, he who now rests in God's peace, I wish to share some thoughts deeply inspired by his vision. May his immense legacy continue to guide us.

Pope Francis always paid particular attention to the Mediterranean, which he considered a crossroads of cultures and contemporary challenges. In his numerous interventions, he emphasized that this region is both a place of encounter and tragedy, especially for migrants, many of whom are vulnerable women and children.

During the "Mediterranean Encounters" initiated in Bari, Marseille, and elsewhere, Pope Francis always insisted on the crucial role of women as peacebuilders and architects of intercultural dialogue. He liked to remind us that women bring this "capacity to nurture life" and "care for relationships" so necessary in this region marked by tensions. I particularly remember his words addressed to us during a meeting of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue with women from around the world representing 12 different religions: *"because women bring care and life to the world: they are the path to peace"*¹.

The synodal process that I have had the honor to serve reflects Pope Francis's deep conviction that the Church must listen more to women's voices and involve them more in governance. Synodality invites us to create spaces where all voices can be heard, which is a crucial issue for the Mediterranean region where so many women often bear the weight of conflicts, forced migrations, and persistent inequalities.

Pope Francis consistently denounced patriarchal structures that continue to limit women's full participation, both in society and in the Church. In the Mediterranean, these challenges are particularly pronounced, but we also see signs of hope emerging, with women becoming agents of change in their communities.

Our commitment, in line with Pope Francis's vision, must be to support these Mediterranean women who, despite obstacles, work daily for justice, interreligious dialogue, and peace. Their courage and resilience are living testimonies of the Gospel in action.

May we continue to journey together, men and women, toward a Church and a Mediterranean region where each person can make their unique contribution to the common good. I am with you in this mission, with my prayers and gratitude for all those who have supported this meeting in Malta and the MED 25 project – Le Bel Espoir to contribute to peace-building in the Mediterranean.

Sr Nathalie Becquart, xmcj, Undersecretary of the Synod of Bishops