

**ANAGWO: “Ite, Missa Est” and Synodal Church in the Light of Christian Witnessing: The African Perspective**

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**“ITE, MISSA EST” AND SYNODAL CHURCH IN THE LIGHT OF CHRISTIAN WITNESSING: THE AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE**

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**Abstract**

*The Synod on Synodality calls for communion, participation and mission. Every Eucharistic celebration ends with the dismissal command “Ite, Missa Est” as a missionary mandate. In this way, it finds justification for the third dimension of the theme of the synod. Unfortunately, some worshippers do not have deeper understanding of the mandate. As such, they have not come to terms with the Eucharist as a springboard for the realization of the missionary mandate of Jesus. Instead, some in the liturgical assembly see Eucharistic liturgy only from the ceremonial point of view. Accordingly, the fruits are not seen in this missionary drive to go into the world to renew it. Consequently, the effect of the mandate is not very evident in the immediate community. With the aids of descriptive and analytical methods, the paper argues that at the end of every Eucharistic celebration, the people of God are sent out into the world to continue the celebration by calling others to the banquet through their Christian witnessing. Each participant, who has been fed and nourished at the two tables of the Word and the Sacraments, is invited and challenged to this mission of preaching the Gospel to the ends of the earth.*

**Keywords:** Mass, Dismissal Mandate, Synod, Church, Christian, Witnessing

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## 1. Introduction

The 16<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops referred to as the Synod on Synodality will take place in October 2023 with the theme: “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission.”<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis categorically states that: “Synodality is a style, it is a walk together, and it is what the Lord expects from the Church of the third millennium.”<sup>3</sup> According to the International Theological Commission, synodality is “the action of the Spirit in the communion of the Body of Christ and in the missionary journey of the People of God.”<sup>4</sup> It is more commonly understood as a process whereby the Church undergoes discernment on a variety of issues. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the synod intends that by its fruits, the laity, priests, bishops and religious each uses their own variety of gifts and charisms to help the Church make decisions and engage in the missionary mandate, emanating from “*Ite Missa Est*” (Go forth, the Mass is Ended).

Africa, a continent richly endowed with abundant human as well as natural resources, appears caught in the web of religious harlotry and half-baked syndrome of not having deeper understanding of the mandate.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the import of the dismissal mandate, which is vital and essential in the liturgical celebration, is still being misunderstood even after nearly sixty (60) years of the closure of the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). This is because truncated understanding of “*Ite Missa Est*” in some parishes in Africa is

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<sup>2</sup>Pope Francis, “Vatican church world” in *Vatican News* from <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2021-10/pope-francis-discourse-moment-reflection-eve-inauguration-synod.html> accessed 10<sup>th</sup> April, 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, “Vatican church world” accessed 10<sup>th</sup> May, 2022.

<sup>4</sup> International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops, <http://www.itenesfrpt.org>, accessed on 8<sup>th</sup> May, 2022, 3.

<sup>5</sup> It is pertinent to note that Africans are mainly inhabitants of the African continent, the second largest continent in the world. It is made up of about fifty-three (53) countries excluding the West Sahara which consists of five geographical sub-regions, namely, the Central Africa, East Africa, North Africa, South Africa and West Africa with an estimated population of about 1.34 billion inhabitants as of 2020 (Source: 2022 United Nation World Population Prospects).

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characterised by practices that are incongruent with the spirit of the liturgy in general and the Catholic liturgy in particular. This is fuelled by a lack of the understanding on the import of the dismissal mandate by participants and even sometimes by the priests. After all, some worshippers have not come to terms with the Eucharist as a springboard for the realization of the missionary mandate of Jesus. Rather, they see Eucharistic liturgy only from the ceremonial point of view. As such, the effect of the mandate is not very evident in the immediate community.

Apparently, today some members of the Body of Christ are constantly at war over political party affiliations, contracts, appointment of bishops and posting of priests and location of local government councils, human rights abuse and violations, to mention but a few. In a synodal church, God gathers all as diverse people- laity, consecrated and ordained-together as a family to participate in the Christian worship through the gifts they have had from the Holy Spirit and to be sent out to testify the love they celebrate to the whole human race. Liturgy has a two-fold function in the Church: “to constitute the Church and to express the Church.”<sup>6</sup> In the liturgy, God’s people gather, listen, eat and are sent forth on mission. These four vital actions link liturgy to life- their participating in the liturgy must end at bringing others to Christ. For this to be achieved, the faithful have to participate actively in a liturgy that responds to their deepest aspirations. The Synod on Synodality calls for a reflection on three major theological concepts: communion, participation and mission. The third of these pillars is mission and is the major focus that inspired this paper. It is, however, important to note that these ideas, though distinct, have an intrinsic interconnectedness. This paper re-evaluates for a liturgical catechesis of the pastoral dimension of mission and its centrality in the process of Synod on Synodality. It is, however, important to understand the key terms of this study first in order to establish the theological basis and the mission towards a synodal church for Christian witnessing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century African Christianity, of this discourse.

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<sup>6</sup> Irene H. Dalmais, “The Liturgy as Celebration,” in W.V Dwight, (ed.), *Primary Sources of Liturgical Theology: A Reader*, (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2000) 26.

## **2. Exploring the Key Terms: *Ite, Missa Est*, Synodal Church and Christian Witnessing**

To set the paper in a better perspective, some key terms are explored, namely, *Ite, Missa Est*, Synodal Church and Christian Witnessing.

### **2.1 *Ite, Missa Est- Go forth, the Mass is Ended***

*Ite, Missa Est* (Go forth, the Mass is Ended) is the concluding rite of the entire structure of the Holy Mass.<sup>7</sup> It is derived from the middle English *Cristemasse*. Actually, *Crist* (genitive *Cristes*) is from Greek *Khristos* (*Xpistos*) Christ whereas *Masse* is from the Latin *Missa*. It is a term used to describe the Eucharistic liturgy which is the central worship in the Roman Catholic Church. From the phrase “*Ite, Missa est*”, “Go, it is dismissal” (sending) or ‘Go, the Mass is over’. From perfect passive participle *missus*, dismissed or sending from verb *mittere*, send. On the other hand, it is the perfect passive of *mitto* meaning “it is dismissed” (with “It” refers to the congregation). *Missa* is an ancient Latin form of the classical mission “dismissal”. *Missa est* would then be “It is the dismissal”. Some authors then translated it to be “mission” (“[go] there is a mission”).<sup>8</sup>

It is also possible that *missa* (dismissal) from spoken Vulgar Latin ended up being borrowed back into written Latin to mean “Mass”. In this phrase, it is where the noun “Mass” comes from in English. After all, in this case, *Missa est* would mean “this is the Mass”, saying that Mass has ended. The Mass is the highest form of prayer in the Catholic worship.<sup>9</sup> It concludes with a brief dialogue between the priest and the congregation. Accordingly, “Go forth, the Mass is Ended” (*Ite, Missa Est*) literally

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<sup>7</sup> The other three options or alternatives are: “Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord, Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life and Go in peace” (see *The Roman Missal renewed by decree of the Most Holy Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, promulgated by authority of Pope Paul VI and revised at the direction of Pope John Paul II, English translation according to the Third typical edition*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2011, 596).

<sup>8</sup> Jeremy Driscoll, *What happens at Mass* (Chicago: Liturgical Training, 2011) 129.

<sup>9</sup> Emmanuel C. Anagwo, *Hundred Questions and Answers on the Mass Vol I* (Onitsha: Laurans Publisher, 2013) 6.

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means “Go, it has been sent”. From the phrase, we derived the word “Mass” as well as the word “Missal”, which is the name of the book for celebrating Mass and again may contain the readings from the scripture. In his Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Pope Benedict XVI discusses the development of *Missa* from meaning “dismiss” to mean one’s “mission”. In antiquity, Pope Benedict VI writes, *Missa* simply means “Dismissal.” However, in Christian usage, it gradually took on a deeper meaning. The word “dismissal” has come to imply a “mission”. These few words succinctly express the missionary nature of the Church.<sup>10</sup> Hence, “*Ite*” means, “all of you, go.” “*Missa Est*” means, “this is your mission.”<sup>11</sup> This sending of the disciples to preach and spread the Gospel to all nations is what *Ite, Missa Est* is all about.

### **2.2 Synodal Church**

The expression “Synodal Church” is made of two words, namely, “Synodal” and “Church.” The word “synodal” is an adjective and its noun “synod” comes from an ancient Greek term that means “traveling together.” It is made up of a preposition *sun* (with) and the noun *hodos* (path) and it designates the path along which God’s people walk together. In the ancient Church, local leaders used to “come together to pray and make decisions about matters affecting all the Christian communities in a region.”<sup>12</sup> These meetings were called ‘synods.’ From the earliest times, those who have gathered in the name of the Lord are also designated as the Church. The English word “Church” is a translation of the Greek word *ekklesia*. The classical Greek *ekklesia* meant “assembly of citizens”, and so implied a democratic equality among its members who met for legislative purposes and other forms of deliberations. Though the word carried more political or exclusive undertone in the Greco-Roman Empire, the New Testament (NT) understanding of the word refers to and includes “people” both within

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<sup>10</sup> Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Sacramentum Caritatis* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2007) 51.

<sup>11</sup> Josefino Rona, *Divine Indwelling: Key to the Wisdom Knowledge and Power of God from within Man* (Bloomington: Xlibris Corporation, 2011) 203.

<sup>12</sup> William Clark, “What is the Synod of Bishops? A Catholic Priest and Theologian Explains,” *The Conversation*, October 13, 2021 accessed 25<sup>th</sup> April, 2022.

and outside the Roman Empire, thus enlarging its meaning. This inclusive sense of the “church” could also be traced back to the Old Testament (OT) understanding of the word. Hence, we see the term *kahal*, which means ‘the assemble of all (religious) people’ (see Deut 23; 1 Kgs 8, Ps 22).

Pope Francis conceives of synodality in terms of “journeying together” that involves all the faithful in the Church. The Pontiff’s conception of synodality is marked by the relational dynamics of journeying together, attentive listening and open conversation, which underpins one of the trademarks of his pontificate. Accordingly, a synodal church is a Church that walks together “... to listen to each other, to dialogue, to discern and to harmonise their many and varied approaches and contributions.”<sup>13</sup> It is one in which exists “a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit ... to know what he “says to the Churches” (Rev 2:7)”<sup>14</sup> It is a Church in which all her members walk together, listen to the Holy Spirit, share in her mission. Each member shares in her mission through his/her participation.

### **2.3 Christian Witnessing**

Christian witnessing is an adjectival phrase formed from two words: Christian and Witness. The word ‘Christian’ functions in this phrase as the adjective qualifying the noun witnessing. As an adjective, the word Christian means “based on or believing the teachings of Jesus of Jesus Christ. Etymologically, the word ‘Christian’ is derived from the Ancient Greek word Χριστός, (*Christos*), a translation of the Hebrew ‘messiah,’ which means “the anointed one.” The word in turn was used to coin the word “Christian” referring to the follower of Christ (Acts 11:26). A Christian is a member of the Church of Christ. He/she is one who

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<sup>13</sup> International Theological Commission no.75.

<sup>14</sup> Pope Francis, *Address on the Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops*, 17 October 2015 [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151017\\_50-anniversario-sinodo.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/october/documents/papa-francesco_20151017_50-anniversario-sinodo.html) accessed 28<sup>th</sup> April, 2022.

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adheres to Christianity, an Abrahamic, monotheistic religion based on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. In addition, Catholic Christians accept the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, participate in the Eucharistic liturgy and the sacraments, and give allegiance to the Catholic hierarchy and especially the Pope.<sup>15</sup>

As a Christian religious term, ‘witness’ means ‘a person who testifies for Christ or the Christian faith by his/her actions or words; formerly especially for martyr’.<sup>16</sup> John Mckenzie observes that the English word ‘witness’ derives from the Greek word, *martyrs* and the cognates (*martyria, martyrion*). He further states that witness “...is never an impersonal marshalling of facts but always remains a personal attestation...The witness consists in the communion of a person to the truth which he attests. The supreme commitment of a person to truth is the commitment of his/her life. This is implied in Rev 2:15, and 17:6”.<sup>17</sup>

This immediately defines the idea of Christian witnessing as could be differentiated from the court-room legalistic idea of witnessing in modern day formal jurisprudence. Christian witnessing involves personal commitment to attest to Truth per excellence, the Christ Jesus. It is supreme commitment: to Christ, to attest that Christ is the Truth, the Way and the Life (John 14:6). It could be in the form of martyrdom: it could be seen *via* evangelical and missionary enterprises as preaching the Word of God, charity work, apostleship through the pen, apologetic endeavours, all geared towards making Christ known round the world (Matt 28:19). The question therein is: “What is the theology behind this Christian witnessing especially at affects *Ite, Missa est*?”

### **3. *Ite, Missa Est* and Theology of Christian Witnessing**

Theology deals with the relationship between God and creation and to do away with theology is to attempt to rule the world created by God

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<sup>15</sup> John A. Hardon, *Modern Catholic Dictionary* (Kentucky: Eternal Life, 1999) 101.

<sup>16</sup> Lesley Brown (ed.), *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, Vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) 3706-3707.

<sup>17</sup> John I. Mckenzie, *Dictionary of the Bible* (London: Macmillan Publication, 1976) 935.

without God. We cannot sharply separate considerations of *Ite, Missa Est* and Christian witnessing from theology. There is a symbiotic relationship between Mass and Christian witnessing. They are both intertwined and are so strongly related that it is difficult for one to exist without the other. Both are closely knitted. One is mutually related to the other as every Mass ends with the missionary mandate to go into the world to witness to Christ. And the missionary activity is thus intimately linked with the sending forth to carry out the Good News beyond the frontiers of one's vicinity.<sup>18</sup> A Christian cannot say that he/she has celebrated Mass if the fruits of the Mass, seen in communion with others, cannot affect the neighbour. And that is mission in action. Indeed, Christian life must produce changes by way of witnessing.

Jesus Christ is the '*ho pistos*', that is, faithful witness per excellence (Rev 1:5; 3:14). He has come into the world to bear witness to the truth (John 18:37). This is the witness of what he has seen and heard from the Father (John 3:11). His witness is against the evil world (3:11; 8:13), this testimony has juridically undisputable value because other evidence supports it -the witness of John the Baptist, which summarizes his whole mission (see 1:6ff, 15, 19; 3:26ff; 10:25). There is also the witness of the works accomplished by Jesus at the command of the Father (5:36; 10:25). The apostles, even Paul and Stephen bear witness to Jesus to the point of paying with their lives. They are witnesses to the life and mission of Jesus, namely, his teachings and deeds (works and signs) and especially his trials, death and resurrection. They are given the mandate to preach the Gospel, to baptize in the name of the Trinity; Jesus will be with them as they bear witness to him (see Matt 28: 16ff; Mark 16: 15ff; Acts 1: 8).

In our time, the Christian, like Deborah Samuel Yakubu, who was recently murdered in cold blood in Sokoto, Nigeria,<sup>19</sup> is to go and be a

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<sup>18</sup> The missionary activity includes the *missio ad gentes* and the re-evangelization of the Western world and European countries where the Gospel message is fast eluding the initial impetus and commitment.

<sup>19</sup> *Nigerian Tribune*, 14<sup>th</sup> May, 2022, "Killing of Deborah, Sokoto Female Student: British Govt says Murder was Horrific, Demands Trial of Her Murders" in <https://tribuneonlineng.com/killing-of-deborah-sokoto-female->



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beacon or harbinger of hope and light to the hopeless and darkened world. Having taken part in the Eucharistic liturgy with the whole mind, soul and body, there is a responsibility flowing from the import of this celebration.<sup>20</sup> The challenges to mission, self-denial, truth, love, sharing, justice, etc are real and are the means to attain the purpose of liturgical participation. Consequently, the dismissal formula *Ite Missa Est*, as a farewell blessing, is an invitation to and a mandate for mission. It is not a statement inserted into the liturgy accidentally; rather, it marks the beginning of mission. It means from *missa* to *missio* (The Mass has ended; the mission begins). This is the sense of the Second Vatican Council Document, *Ad Gentes* when it says “mission” means the term usually given to those particular undertakings by which the heralds of the Gospel are sent out by the Church to go forth into the whole world to carry out the task of preaching the Gospel and planting the Church among the people or groups who do not yet believe in Christ.<sup>21</sup>

It is wrong to say that once the Mass is over, everything has come to an end. Instead, what we have celebrated must flow into the daily life of the community. That is where the missionary import touches the society to feel the impact of the active, full and conscious participation of the Mass. Margaret Clark affirms that, “the worship which does not involve our life, which does not blossom out in fraternal love, is a pharisaic abomination in the eyes of the Lord.”<sup>22</sup> That marks the theology and correlation between the Mass and Christian witnessing. Through the former, the faithful receives the mandate to practice the latter. The

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student-british-govt-says-murder-was-horrific-demands-trial-of-her-murderers/  
accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> May, 2022.

<sup>20</sup> Emmanuel C. Anagwo, “From Mass to Mission: The Task to Create a Just African Society” in Luke Ijezie *et al.* (eds.), *The Church in African: Witness to Justice, Peace and Reconciliation A Post-Synodal Reflection and Reception Proceedings of the 27<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the Catholic Theological Association of Nigeria* (CATHAN Publication, 2013) 260

<sup>21</sup> Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes* (The Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church) in Austin Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II*, (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1987) 1.

<sup>22</sup> Margaret Clark, *Christians Around the Altar*, (Indiana: Fides Publishers, 1958) 69.

faithful is expected to live out the missionary mandate received towards Christian witnessing. Francis Cardinal Arinze rightly states: “the Holy Eucharist teaches us to take more and more notice of our neighbour and to love him/her.”<sup>23</sup>

The Mass and Christian witnessing, therefore, have a great deal of symbiotic relationship with their theological underpinnings because they are inextricably intertwined. Both are strongly related that it is difficult for one to exist without the other. Accordingly, F. Desplanques prophetically says: “Go! The Mass is over Yes! But it is never ended... it goes on.”<sup>24</sup> He further says: “The Mass never ended as long as there are on the earth poor little ones who are hungry...orphans who have never known the Father...prodigals far from the Father’s house, who feed themselves on husk...the Mass goes on. But what affects me most deeply is that the Mass never ends.”<sup>25</sup> More importantly, the liturgical actions of the Mass depict it as a *continuum* whereby the concept of Christian witnessing has stronghold. Eucharistic liturgy nourishes the Church and her mission. Mission is continued through the prayers, sacrifices, sacraments, sacramentals, and blessings that that are the constituents of the liturgy. The *Ite, Missa est* is not intended to be the end of the effects of the liturgical act in the lives of those who participate in it. The *Ite, Missa est* is intended to be the beginning of concrete engagement with reality and the world outside of the celebration, such that the fruits of the Eucharist are taken to the world outside.<sup>26</sup>

#### **4. *Ite, Missa Est* and Mission Towards a Synodal Church for Christian Witnessing in the 21<sup>st</sup> African Christianity**

From the foregoing, the paper reiterates that at the end of every Eucharistic celebration, Christians who attend the worship are sent out into the field to continue the celebration by calling others to the banquet through their way of living. Hence, they are dismissed with the words

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<sup>23</sup> Francis Cardinal Arinze, *The Holy Eucharist Our Life*, (Onitsha: Tabansi, 1981) 60.

<sup>24</sup> F. Desplanques, *Living the Mass* (New York: Newman, 1957) 169.

<sup>25</sup> Desplanques 170.

<sup>26</sup> Anthony O. Igbekele, “Liturgy and the Mission of the Church in *Maximum Illud*” in *Abuja Journal of Philosophy and Theology* (APT), Vol. 10, 2020, 125.

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*Ite, Missa est* (Go forth, the Mass is ended). While the celebration ends, the mission begins. In the words of Pope St. John Paul II, “the dismissal at the end of each Mass is a charge given to Christians, inviting them to work for the spread of the Gospel and the imbuing of society with Christian values.”<sup>27</sup> The Pontiff further states:

The Eucharist not only provides the interior strength needed for this mission, but is also-in some sense-*its plan*. For the Eucharist is a mode of being, which passes from Jesus into each Christian, through whose testimony it is meant to spread throughout society and culture. For this to happen, each member of the faithful must assimilate, through personal and communal meditation, the values which the Eucharist expresses, the attitudes it inspires, the resolutions to which it gives rise.<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, the Eucharist is a challenge to unity in diversity, to creativity, to availability, openness, sincerity and inclusive participation. Simply put, it is to be like Jesus who has been anointed to preach Good News to the poor, proclaim liberty to the captives, sight to the blind and freedom of the oppressed (Luke 4:18). The Church has drawn attention to this age-long mandate in the ongoing synod to engage in Christian witnessing in order to transform the society, improve the lot of many and implant new values. Frederick R. McManus pinpointedly avers that, “at each celebration of the Eucharist, the Christian is challenged to renew his commitment to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to membership in his Body, the Church, and to the living the covenanted relationship with the Lord manifested by a life of service to others.”<sup>29</sup> Without doubt, the Eucharistic celebration is an opportune moment to reiterate commitment to Christ, the centre of one’s being, the one who gives meaning to everything. Besides, everything is a like dross compared to him (Col 3:7-8). If this mind is formed in the Christians, corruption will certainly be a

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<sup>27</sup> John Paul II, *Mane Nobiscum Domine* (Trivandrum: Carmel International, 2004) no. 24.

<sup>28</sup> *Mane Nobiscum Domine* no. 25.

<sup>29</sup> Frederick R. McManus, *Thirty Years of Liturgical Renewal: Statement of the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy*, (Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1987) 182.

thing of the past. This means that the desire to establish the Kingdom of God that left no time for pleasure and gathering of materials would characterize the Christians' relationship to the created world.

As Christians are called to make the world better place, this is to be done with mind set on the things that are in heaven where Christ is enthroned in glory (Col 3:1-4). In this way, they will reaffirm the Eucharist, "the Easter Sacrament", is what shapes their thoughts, words and actions. It means that Christians are in the world but not of world (John 17:16). The Eucharistic celebration intensifies the dual citizenship of the Christians such that their daily activity, though taken with utmost seriousness, is directed toward unfolding the hope of the resurrection and the glory of God. This is pertinent in our secularized world that negates the presence of God or forgets God: incarnating the Eucharistic plan in daily life in all places by putting all things in proper limits.<sup>30</sup> Austin Echema reinstates the fact that Eucharistic celebration makes Christians to appropriate the fruits of redemption, and commit themselves to ensure that it is extended to others but above to eternal life.<sup>31</sup>

Admittedly, Christians in Africa and beyond who have internalized the fruits of the Eucharistic celebration should show such through their fruits. This is because they will not live for themselves but only for Christ who compels them to excellent, good and noble works (see Phil 4:8). Christians should be seen as advocates and promoters of "the change" clamoured for, ensuring that such a change is positive and brings the best to their society. Accordingly, their attitude towards Christian witnessing in the Church and society is urgent and demands sincere engagement. Justin the martyr depicts the Eucharistic celebration as something that overflows the confines of the place where it is celebrated. The Christian responsibility is affirmed by bringing the Eucharist to those who were absent and by making concerted efforts to

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<sup>30</sup> *Mane Nobiscum Domine* no. 26.

<sup>31</sup> Austin Echema, "Liturgical Pedagogy and Nation-building." *Theological Education for Human Development and Nation-building in Africa*. Ferdinand Nwaigbo ed. *et al.* (PortHarcourt: Royal Ascenders, 2010) 275.

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meet the needs of Christians wherever they maybe.<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, a synodal church is the wake-up call for collaborative ministry which involves consultation, obedience, span of control, decentralisation, submissiveness to a higher superior and so on. In the Catholic worship, hierarchical participation exists and is strongly encouraged for Christian witnessing. Every baptized Christian is qualified to participate “according to their rank, office and degree of participation in the Eucharist.”<sup>33</sup> It has always been the intention of the Church that within parishes, priests and lay people may collaborate in service to the community without giving in to the temptation of discouragement. The Document of the Second Vatican Council rightly states: "The laity should cooperate in the Church's work of evangelization; as witnesses and at the same time as living instruments, they share in her saving mission."<sup>34</sup> This call for a synodal church to thrive must be the challenge before clergy, the consecrated men and women and the lay faithful as they engage in Christian witnessing.

### **5. Conclusion**

The paper has tried to unravel that the synodal church invites all to be part of the Christian witnessing in the world. This calls for the involvement and participation of everyone in the life and mission of the Church. After all, Pope St. Paul VI, in his address to a group of lay faithful in Rome on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 1974, said: “The men of our day are more impressed by witness than by teachers; and if they listen to these it is because they also bear witness.”<sup>35</sup> The current discussion on the Synod on Synodality will have desired result in Africa if the Church bears witness to Christ. The non-Christians will not listen to their preaching if their lifestyle contradicts what they preach and what they teach. If they preach justice and peace where human rights are advocated, they must make sure that themselves implement these in their dealings with those in their care or the society will not take them seriously. Christian life is

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<sup>32</sup> Dennis Billy, *The Bread of the Eucharist* (New York: New City Press, 2010) 61.

<sup>33</sup> GIRM 91.

<sup>34</sup> *Ad Gentes*, no.41.

<sup>35</sup> Austin Flannery, *Vatican Collection*, Vol. 2 (More Post Conciliar Documents) ‘*Evangelii Nuntiandi*’ No. 41 (Ibadan: Ambassador Press, 1990) 728.

not a “cakewalk”, but profession of faith expressed in action through witnessing. In the words of Patrick C. Chibuko, “the Church is expected to complete the work of Christ on earth by continuing to carry on the mission which he began while he was on earth in their midst. This includes the mission of announcing the Good News to the poor, freedom to captives and joy to mourners.”<sup>36</sup> The celebrants and participants at the Eucharistic celebration are never to remain the same as they were before and after the encounter with the Lord. The Eucharist which still remains a simple but sumptuous meal that nourishes the members for soul and body’s wellbeing has equally a great thrust to nourish and influence a great deal the social values of the larger society. As in the time of Christ and the early Church, this import of “*Ite, Missa Est*” challenges for Christian witnessing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century African Christianity and beyond to act in accordance with their enlightened consciences. Christian witnessing, therefore, demands that members of any given Christian community must endeavour to be part of this second pillar of the theme of the Synod on Synodality as the Eucharistic celebration has always challenged and empowered them to act accordingly.

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<sup>36</sup> Patrick C. Chibuko, *Ite Missa Est – Go the Mass is Ended: Implications for Missionary Activities in the Third Millennium Church* (Enugu: Black Belt, 2004) 50.