

# Prayer, homilies, understanding emerge as early themes at Bible synod

VATICAN CITY - Learning to pray with the Scriptures, improving homilies and ensuring an accurate interpretation of Bible passages were the major themes of formal presentations, open discussion and small-group work Oct. 7-8 at the world Synod of Bishops on the Bible.

Canadian Basilian Father Thomas Rosica, the synod's English-language briefing officer, said the three concerns came up repeatedly during the Oct. 7 open-mike discussion in the synod hall and in small groups Oct. 8.

Pope Benedict XVI was not present for the Oct. 7 evening session, and he does not participate in the small-group discussions.

Father Rosica said many synod participants asked not just for an explanation of "lectio divina" (divine reading - a form of prayerful meditation on Scripture), but also asked someone to lead the synod in the exercise so members could experience it for themselves.

"One of the things that is emerging from all over the place is not just the need for 'lectio divina,' but many of the bishops say, 'We don't know what it is; would you please model this?' There were two very strong appeals" to offer the experience to synod members, Father Rosica said.

Father Rosica participated in one of the English working groups Oct. 8 and said "lectio divina" was mentioned by the majority of the 32 group participants.

The synod has three groups each working in French, English and Spanish, two groups working in Italian and one in German.

Another topic repeatedly raised by synod participants, he said, was the need to improve homilies.

Several people mentioned that “homiletics has a very low priority in seminaries” and one participant told synod members, “I took one homiletics course for one semester, one hour a week and that’s all I ended up with.”

Bishop Desiderius Rwoma of Singida, Tanzania, spoke of the importance of homilies during a five-minute presentation to the assembly before the hourlong free discussion began Oct. 7. Ten other synod members also gave such presentations.

“If we speak of people being lukewarm concerning matters of our faith and the phenomenon of religious sects, which are spreading at an alarming speed in many parts of the world, the causes for this can possibly be traced back to lack of good and proper preaching,” he said.

Archbishop Laurent Monsengwo Pasinya of Kinshasa, Congo, special secretary of the synod, also spoke about the spread of sects and how they challenge the church to explain that a fundamentalist reading of the Bible violates what the Bible itself says about interpretation.

While describing a “cancerous proliferation of all types of sects,” the archbishop said that in the New Testament the apostles warned Christians that some parts of the Scriptures are hard to understand and that “false teachers” were leading Christians astray.

Even in the earliest days of Christianity, he said, the teaching of St. Peter and the other apostles was the norm for interpreting the Scriptures correctly.

The Holy Spirit, the apostolic tradition, communion with the church, adherence to the faith of the creed, and coherence with the Bible as a whole “protect us from a fundamentalist and subjective interpretation of the word of God,” the archbishop said.

Bishop Maurice Piat of Port Louis, Mauritius, said that preaching and catechesis often overemphasized doctrine and overlooked the word of God.

“Not resting on the rock of the word, the doctrinal and moral building becomes a house built on sand, and it struggles to resist the tsunami” of modern culture, he said.

When people learn about the word of God speaking to them, calling them into a relationship, they experience it as an offer of friendship and as a call to follow, Bishop Piat said.