

Theological Reflection on the Synod on Synodality

We all seek God's direction through the journey that we encounter in life that at times may seem overwhelming. We may ask, "Lord, show us the way." In doing so, we notice others asking the same question but seemingly on different paths.

If we earnestly desire that all people encounter Jesus on this journey of life, how can we best empower others who are seeking the Lord to arrive at the same destination? Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth and the life." What are the means we have to introduce our Lord, and his "way," to all of God's people within the framework of our Catholic faith?

Saint Paul writes in 1 Corinthians: "For though I be free from all men, yet I have made myself servant unto all that might gain the more. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law. To the weak become I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men that I might by all means, save some. And this I do for the Gospel's sake that I might be a partaker, thereof, with you."

We can ask about the complex issues that affect us and can sometimes divide us. Where do we as men, women, married, single, clergy, and youth take a stand? If God's truth is unchanging and people ignore what Jesus has taught us, can "drawing a line in the sand be a loving gesture?" Recall Jesus using his hand to draw on the ground before those who accused the woman of adultery. He won over the woman's heart, challenged her, and caused others to reexamine their lives in his non-verbal teaching and his compassionate forgiveness. Like Jesus, in addition to using our hands for healing and charity, our hands are meant for sculpting the soils of forgiveness.

Jesus has reconciled us to the Father and entrusted the ministry of reconciliation to you and me. The task seems daunting, as the wounds can be very deep. The injured might seek the best doctor, and rightly so. They may pray for a miracle, as we all have, at times, or may lose hope. To give someone hope leads to the strengthening of a person's dignity that better enables them to receive the gifts that the Holy Spirit uniquely bestows on each of us to the glory of God the Father through our Savior, Jesus Christ.

In the book, *Little Talks with God*, edited by Henry Carrigan, Jr., Saint Catherine of Siena speaks in the heart of God the Father when she writes: "It was as if my sweet and loving Word, my Son, had said to you: "Behold, I have made the road, and opened the door with my blood. Do not be negligent to follow. Do not lay down to rest in self-love and ignorance of the road, presuming to choose to serve me in your own way instead of the way that I have made straight for you by means of my Truth, the incarnate Word, and built up with his blood. Rise up then, promptly, and follow him, for no one can reach me, the Father, if not by him. He is the way and the door by which you must enter into me, the Sea of Peace."

Communion, participation and mission are at the foundation of synodality- our common journey into the life of the Holy Trinity. The Lord calls each of us to build up His Mystical Body through the unique gifts that we have each received by the power of the Holy Spirit. Our mission is to teach and inspire others by our example and word about the immense love and mercy that our Savior has for us as we journey together with Jesus walking beside us.

What are our neighbors and we seeking? In John's Gospel, Peter says to Jesus, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of eternal life" (6:68). In the Gospel of Mark, Peter makes no reply; he and the others simply continue to walk together with Jesus.

May we join in the same journey.

Outline of Simplified Synod Process

The Main Question for Prayerful Consultation:

A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together.” How is this “journeying together” happening today in our local Church? What steps does the Holy Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together?”

I. Preparatory Steps

- a. Selection of Diocesan representative to the Synod
 - i. Deacon Stephen Hodson will serve in this capacity
- b. Selection of Delegates:
 - i. Each pastor will select four delegates to participate in and facilitate consultation
 - ii. Deadline: September 15, 2021

II. Saturday, October 16th at 9:00 AM (Saint Francis of Assisi Church, Weston): Commissioning and Orientation of Delegates

- A. Delegates gather to receive their ecclesial commissioning during the celebration of Morning Prayer, followed by an orientation session.
- B. One delegate in each parish will be asked to serve as the coordinator to synthesize the results of the parish’s dialogue and be the point person to communicate with Deacon Steve Hodson

III. Delegate Listening Session - Time frame: Prior to Thanksgiving

- A. Delegates meet with Pastor to discuss pertinent questions for parish discussion and methodology.
 1. Decide on venue: Formal or informal gatherings – auditorium, coffee, gathering spaces, etc.
 2. Invitations: How will each parish invite/promote participation in the dialogue
Possibly give a brief invitation at the end of Masses prior to Session.

IV. Proposed Parish Listening Session(s): Can be amended to the particular needs of a parish

- A. **Venue and Structure:**
 1. Create a warm and welcoming environment and possibly invite societies, youth groups, ushers, lectors, Eucharistic ministers serve as “greeters.”
 2. Offer and opening prayer or hymn to the Holy Spirit
 3. Possibly read Scripture passage

B. Methodology and Questions for Reflection: Companions on the Journey –
Walking together with our Lord on the Way

- a. **Listening** – with an open mind and heart; open to the movement of the Holy Spirit
- b. **Speaking Out** – All invited to speak opening with courage and love as to what God is doing in their lives and community and what can be done to improve the spiritual lives of our fellow Christians and all of God's children
- c. **Celebration** – Walking together as a community is highlighted in our celebration of the Holy Mass: our reception of the Word of God and his most precious body.

Prayers for the Holy Spirit to invite all to a deeper reverence and comprehension of the mysteries of the liturgy.

1. How are we inspired by our liturgical celebrations?
2. How are our important decisions in life formed by the liturgy and sacramental life of our parish?
3. How do we promote active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy?

How are lectors, eucharistic ministers, acolytes, Deacons and other ministers best utilized to enliven the humble, yet glorious Mass

d. Sharing Responsibility for Our Common Mission – We are all missionary disciples.

1. What hinders the baptized from being active in mission?
 - a. What are the gifts that are unique to each person that can be shared?
 - b. What area of mission are we neglecting?
 - c. How does our parish interface with our communities, other faith-based organizations, and other social, political, scientific and educational organizations?
 - d. How does the Church discern the missionary activity choices made and how does the Church help its members to live out their service to society in a missionary way?

e. Dialogue in Church and Society

1. Understanding through perseverance and patience
 - a. How often do we come together to listen to each other?
 - b. Where do we meet?
 - c. What means do we have for communication?
 - d. How do we collaborate with other parishes, dioceses, religious communities, lay associations, movements, etc.?

- e. How do we promote dialogue with those who have no religious affiliation?
- f. How do we dialogue with other sectors of society?
- f. Ecumenism – Dialogue with Christians of different confessions, united by one baptism.**
 - 1. Fostering relationships with other denominations, especially within our immediate communities.
 - a. Fruits/difficulties of walking together?
- g. Authority and Participation**
 - 1. A synodal church is a participatory and co-responsible Church with a structure that is meant to be in communion.
 - a. How do we identify goals as a community of faithful?
 - b. How is authority and governance exercised within our local Church?
 - c. How are teamwork and co-responsibility put into practice?
 - d. How are lay ministries and the gifts and responsibilities of lay people promoted?
 - e. How do synodal bodies function at the level of the local Church (Pastoral Councils in parishes and dioceses, Presbyterial Council, etc.?)
 - f. How can we foster a more synodal approach in our participation and leadership?
- h. Forming Ourselves in Synodality.**
 - 1. Improving our spiritual self-awareness and our other-awareness in the light of the Trinity – the love of the Father, Son & Holy Spirit.
 - a. How does our church community form people to be more capable of “walking together”, listening to one another, participating in mission, and engaging in dialogue?

V. Second Session – January 2022

a. Parish teams to coordinate a second listening/discussion session in January 2022.

1. This session could focus on the joys and sorrows e experienced by parishioners and how they were shared with the faith community.

b. Possibly meet in Church and begin with opening prayer, hymn and appropriate Scripture reading.

c. 2-3 weeks prior to the gathering, preparatory materials should be sent to all participants.

- VI. Delegate De-Briefing Session - Time frame: End of February, 2022**
- a. The purpose of this meeting is for the delegates, in union with the pastor, to review the feedback received from whatever consultation occurred with the people of the parish, towards creating a summary for submission to Deacon Hodson by March 15, 2022.
 - i. The delegate chosen for this person would be responsible for drafting the summary, subject to the pastor's review and approval
- VII. Closing Mass of Thanksgiving: Saturday, April 2, 2022 at 11:00 Am (place to be determined)**
- a. At this Mass, we will give thanks for all that was learned through the synodal journey. The diocesan summary report will also be presented for submission to the USCCB.