

Part of the Church, now and always

Thinking about the Synod on Synodality Report

A resource for personal and parish reflection



“We recall that the purpose of the Synod is not to produce documents, but to plant dreams, draw forth prophecies and visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, bind up wounds, weave together relationships, awaken a dawn of hope, learn from one another and create a bright resourcefulness that will enlighten minds, warm hearts, give strength to our hands.”

Pope Francis October 2018

Compiled by Janet Fearn FMDM

CONTENTS

1 The reality of our world

2 A Church that listens

PART I: THE FACE OF THE SYNODAL CHURCH

3 Walking together as a community

4 Guided by the Spirit

5 The Eucharist: sacrament of unity and diversity

6 The poor are with us

7 Multicultural and multireligious

8 Sharing the vision

9 Working together

PART II: ALL DISCIPLES, ALL MISSIONARIES

10 The Church *is* mission

11 Uniquely women in the Church

12 Following the call

13 Called to serve

14 Leadership in service

15 ...and the Pope

PART III: WEAVING BONDS, BUILDING COMMUNITIES

16 Learning to “become”

17 Thinking and working together

18 Listen and accompany

19 Digital missionaries

20 Communion, participation, mission

21 All for one and one for all

22 Go forth in joy

Introduction

When Pope Francis announced the Synod on Synodality, he offered the Church a unique opportunity for dialogue and discernment. How can the Church best meet the needs of the people in today’s world? Across the entire world, communities and individuals reflected on their unique circumstances and challenges, sharing their reflections, hopes and dreams ahead of the first part of the Synod.

A Synodal Church in Mission is the 40-page synthesis report from the first part of the Synod on Synodality. It offers vast food for thought ahead of the second session, scheduled for 2024. The following pages, which also briefly refer to the *Letter of the Synod to the People of God*, are a resource for personal and communal reflection. In order to produce a brief but comprehensive resource, it has been necessary to quote only part of relevant sections of the original report, which, in full, can be amazingly exciting and inspirational. *Please* read the document *A Synodal Church in Mission*, which is available for download from many sites, including that of the Vatican at <https://www.synod.va/en.html>

May God guide us into the future.

Sr Janet Fearn FMDM

Editor

Foreword

This welcoming gaze of Jesus also invites us to be a welcoming Church, not one with closed doors. In such a complex time as ours, new cultural and pastoral challenges emerge that call for a warm and kindly inner attitude so that we can encounter each other without fear. In synodal dialogue, in this beautiful “journey in the Holy Spirit” that we are making together as the People of God, we can grow in unity and friendship with the Lord in order to look at today’s challenges with his gaze; to become, using a fine expression of St Paul VI, a Church that “makes itself a conversation” (Encyclical Letter *Ecclesiam suam*, 65). A Church “with a gentle yoke” (cf. Mt 11:30), which does not impose burdens and which repeats to everyone: “Come, you who are weary and oppressed, come, you who have lost your way or feel far away, come, you who have closed the doors to hope: the Church is here for you!” The doors of the Church are open to everyone, everyone, everyone!

Brothers and sisters, holy People of God, in the face of the difficulties and challenges that lie ahead, the blessing and welcoming gaze of Jesus prevents us from falling into some dangerous temptations: of being a rigid Church – a customs post –, which arms itself against the world and looks backward; of being a lukewarm Church, which surrenders to the fashions of the world; of being a tired Church, turned in on itself. In the Book of Revelation, the Lord says, “I stand at the door and knock so that it may be opened”; but often, brothers and sisters, he stands at the door knocking but from within the Church so that we may allow him to go out with the Church to proclaim his Gospel.

Pope Francis, Opening Mass of the Synod, 4 October 2023



© Mazur/catholicnews.org.uk

We follow the Gospel: we want to see Jesus

1. The reality of our world

Our assembly took place in the context of a world in crisis, whose wounds and scandalous inequalities resonated painfully in our hearts, infusing our work with a

particular gravity, especially since some of us come from countries where war rages. We prayed for the victims of deadly violence, without forgetting all those who have been forced by misery and corruption to take the dangerous road of migration. We assured our solidarity and commitment alongside the women and men all over the world who are working to build justice and peace.

Letter of the Synod to the People of God



In search of a home
Photo: Sr Janet Fearn

Reflection

How many times do we see mission in terms of plans and programmes? How many times do we see evangelisation as involving any number of strategies, tactics, manoeuvres, techniques, as if we could convert people on the basis of our own arguments? Today the Lord says to us quite clearly: in the mentality of the Gospel, you do not convince people with arguments, strategies or tactics. You convince them by simply learning how to welcome them.

Pope Francis 12 July 2017

Questions

- Do I spend quality time praying for the needs of others?
- Is my parish a place of welcome or do some people feel excluded? Why?
- How can I help my parish to be a centre of welcome and hope?

Prayer

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

2. A Church that listens

To progress in its discernment, the Church absolutely needs to listen to everyone, starting with the poorest... It means listening to those who have been denied the right to speak in society or who feel excluded, even by the Church; listening to people who are victims of racism in all its forms – in particular in some regions to indigenous peoples whose cultures have been scorned. Above all, the Church of our time has the duty to listen, in a spirit of conversion, to those who have been victims of abuse committed by members of the ecclesial body, and to commit herself concretely and structurally to ensuring that this does not happen again.

The Church also needs to listen to the laity, women and men, all called to holiness by virtue of their baptismal vocation: to the testimony of catechists, who in many situations are the first proclaimers of the Gospel; to the simplicity and vivacity of children, the enthusiasm of youth, to their questions, and their pleas; to the dreams, the wisdom and the memory of elderly people. The Church needs to listen to families, to their educational concerns, to the Christian witness they offer in today's world. She needs to welcome the voice of those who want to be involved in lay ministries and to participate in discernment and decision-making structures.

Letter of the Synod to the People of God



Who will listen to these children?

Photo: Sr Janet Fearn

Reflection

Let us ask ourselves: how is my capacity to listen going? Do I let myself be touched by people's lives? Do I know how to spend time with those who are close to me in order to listen? ... Starting a dialogue often happens not through words but silence, by not insisting, by patiently beginning anew to listen to others, hearing about their struggles and what they carry inside. The healing of the heart begins with listening.

Listening. This is what restores the heart... And then, when they have finished talking, you may speak, but listen to everything.

Pope Francis, 5 September 2021

Questions

- Do I sometimes struggle to be heard?
- Do I really listen to others?
- Is my parish a listening parish? Who is unheard?

Prayer

Loving God, give us hearts that listen for your word.

Help us listen.

May we listen to those who struggle daily for dignity.

Let us hear your voice in the stories of those on the margins.

Help us always see what binds us together as sisters and brothers. Amen.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

PART I: THE FACE OF THE SYNODAL CHURCH

3. Walking together as a community

In particular, the many expressions of synodal life in cultural contexts where people are used to walking together as a community and where individualism has not taken root, should be considered for deeper reflection. In this way, synodal practice plays an important part in the Church's prophetic response to an individualism that causes people to turn in on themselves, a populism that divides, and a globalisation that homogenises and flattens. Although not solving these problems, it nonetheless provides an alternative way of being and acting for our times, integrating a diversity of perspectives. This is a hopeful alternative that needs further exploration and illumination.

A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report.1



Community is unity and strength

Photo: Sr Janet Fearn

Reflection

Every encounter is fruitful. Each encounter returns people and things to their place... We are accustomed to this indifference, whether it be when we see the calamities of this world or when faced with the 'little things'. We limit ourselves to saying: "Oh, what a shame, poor people, they suffer so much", and then we move on. An encounter, however, is different: If I do not look, — seeing is not enough, no: look — if I do not stop, if I do not look, if I do not touch, if I do not speak, I cannot create an encounter and I cannot help to create a culture of encounter.

Pope Francis, 13 September 2016

Questions

- Why have some people felt resistant to the synodal process?
- What does the word "encounter" mean to me?
- Can we build spaces for young people to speak freely for themselves, within their families, and with their peers and pastors, including through digital channels?

Prayer

Bind us together, Lord.

Bind us together

With cords that cannot be broken.

Bind us together, Lord.

Bind us together in Love.

4. Guided by the Spirit

Conversation in the Spirit is a tool that, even with its limitations, enables authentic listening in order to discern what the Spirit is saying to the Churches. Its practice has elicited joy, awe and gratitude and has been experienced as a path of renewal that transforms individuals, groups, and the Church. The word "conversation" expresses more than mere dialogue: it interweaves thought and feeling, creating a shared vital space. That is why we can say that conversion is at play in conversation... Grace brings this human experience to fruition. Conversing "in the Spirit" means living the experience of sharing in the light of faith and seeking God's will in an authentically evangelical atmosphere within which the Holy Spirit's unmistakable voice can be heard.

A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report.2

Reflection

Sometimes friendly conversations can open a breach even in the most hardened of hearts... We experience this in society, where kindness is not only a question of "etiquette" but a genuine antidote to cruelty, which unfortunately can poison hearts

and make relationships toxic. We need it in the field of media, so that communication does not foment acrimony that exasperates, creates rage and leads to clashes, but helps people peacefully reflect and interpret with a critical yet always respectful spirit, the reality in which they live.

Communicating heart to heart: “In order to speak well, it is enough to love well.”

Pope Francis, 24 January 2023

Questions

- How do I try to work out what the Spirit is saying to me in my life, plans and actions?
- Do I sometimes need help in decision-making?
- How does my parish make decisions? Do we have facilitators to help us reach good choices?

Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and light in us the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and we shall be created, and you shall renew the face of the earth. Amen.

5. The Eucharist: sacrament of unity and diversity

From the Eucharist we learn to articulate unity and diversity: unity of the Church and multiplicity of Christian communities; unity of the sacramental mystery and variety of liturgical traditions; unity of celebration and diversity of vocations, charisms and ministries. Nothing shows more than the Eucharist that the harmony created by the Spirit is not uniformity and that every ecclesial gift is intended for common edification.

A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report.3



Together in love

© Mazur/catholicnews.org.uk

Reflection

This evening we too are gathered round the table of the Lord, the table of the Eucharistic sacrifice, in which he once again gives us his Body and makes present the one sacrifice of the Cross. It is in listening to his word, in nourishing ourselves with his Body and his Blood that he moves us on from being a multitude to being a community, from anonymity to communion. The Eucharist is the sacrament of communion that brings us out of individualism so that we may follow him together, living out our faith in him. Therefore, we should all ask ourselves before the Lord: how do I live the Eucharist? Do I live it anonymously or as a moment of true communion with the Lord, and also with all the brothers and sisters who share this same banquet? What are our Eucharistic celebrations like?

Pope Francis, 20 May 2013

Questions

- How central to my life are the sacraments, especially the Eucharist?
- Do I feel part of a community of faith when I go to Mass in my parish?
- Does the Mass in my parish express the variety within my parish? Who is “in” and who is “out”?

Prayer

Lord, come and change us to be a sign of your love...

We come to your table with our lives as they are.

Heal us, Lord, for we are broken; make us one again. Amen.

6. The poor are with us

Those in poverty ask the Church for love. By love, they mean respect, acceptance and recognition, without which providing food, money or social services represents forms of support that are certainly important but which do not fully take account of the dignity of the person...

Poverty is not just of one kind. Among the many faces of those in poverty are those who do not have the things they need to lead a dignified life. There are also migrants and refugees; indigenous peoples, original and Afro-descendent peoples; those who suffer violence and abuse, in particular women; people struggling with addiction; minorities who are systematically denied a voice; abandoned elderly people; victims of racism, exploitation, and trafficking, especially minors; exploited workers; the economically excluded, and others living on the peripheries. The most vulnerable of the vulnerable, on whose behalf constant advocacy is needed, include the unborn and their mothers. The Assembly hears the cry of the "new poor," produced by wars and terrorism that plague many countries on several continents, and the Assembly condemns the corrupt political and economic systems that cause such strife.

Alongside forms of material poverty, many also experience spiritual poverty, understood as lacking a sense of life's meaning...

Standing with those who are poor requires engaging with them in caring for our common home: the cry of the earth and the cry of those living in poverty are the same cry.

A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report.4



Guilty of fighting for justice

Photo: Sr Janet Fearn

Reflection

We know how hard it is for our contemporary world to see poverty clearly for what it is. Yet in myriad ways poverty challenges us daily, in faces marked by suffering, marginalisation, oppression, violence, torture and imprisonment, war, deprivation of freedom and dignity, ignorance and illiteracy, medical emergencies and shortage of work, trafficking and slavery, exile, extreme poverty and forced migration. Poverty has the face of women, men and children exploited by base interests, crushed by the machinations of power and money. What a bitter and endless list we would have to compile were we to add the poverty born of social injustice, moral degeneration, the greed of a chosen few, and generalised indifference! ...

There is a poverty that stifles the spirit of initiative of so many young people by keeping them from finding work. There is a poverty that dulls the sense of personal responsibility and leaves others to do the work while we go looking for favours. There is a poverty that poisons the wells of participation and allows little room for professionalism; in this way it demeans the merit of those who do work and are productive. To all these forms of poverty we must respond with a new vision of life and society.

Pope Francis, 19 November 2017

Questions

- Who are the “poor people” who live in my local community? Why are they poor?
- How does my parish support people who are poor or marginalised?
- How can my parish and I bring hope to people who feel they have no hope?

Prayer

Take my hands, I give them to you, Lord. Prepare them for the service of your name. Open them to human need and by their love they'll sow your seed so all may know the love and hope you give. Amen.

7. Multicultural and multireligious

Churches live in increasingly multicultural and multireligious contexts. This necessitates finding ways to create dialogue between religions and cultures, with which Christians should engage alongside the many groups that compose a society. Living the Church's mission in these contexts requires a style of presence, service and proclamation that seeks to build bridges, cultivate mutual understanding and engage in evangelisation that accompanies, listens and learns...

Migration reshapes local churches as cross-cultural communities. Migrants and refugees, many of whom bear the wounds of uprooting, war and violence, often become a source of renewal and enrichment for the communities that welcome them and an opportunity to establish direct links with geographically distant churches. In the face of increasingly hostile attitudes toward migrants, we are called to practise an open welcome, to accompany them in the construction of a new life and to build a true intercultural communion among peoples. Respect for the liturgical traditions and religious practices of migrants is an integral part of an authentic welcome.

A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report.5



Photo: Sr Janet Fearn

The Holy Family as seen through African eyes in a German church

Reflection

Shipwreck is something that thousands of men, women and children have experienced in the Mediterranean in recent years. Sadly, for many of them, it ended in tragedy. Just yesterday we received news of a rescue off the coast of Libya, of only four migrants from a boat that was carrying about ninety people. Let us pray for these our brothers and sisters who died in the Mediterranean Sea. Let us also pray that we may be saved from another kind of shipwreck taking place: the shipwreck of civilisation, which threatens not only migrants but us all. How can we save ourselves from this shipwreck which risks sinking the ship of our civilisation? By conducting ourselves with kindness and humanity. By regarding people not merely as statistics, but... for what they really are: people, men and women, brothers and sisters, each with his or her own life story. By imagining that those same people we see on crowded boats or adrift in the sea, on our televisions or in the newspapers, could be any one of us, or our sons or daughters...

Pope Francis, 3 April 2022

Questions

- How do I regard people of a different nationality from mine?
- Have I ever attended Mass celebrated by a different cultural group?
- Does my parish celebrate national and cultural diversity?
- What can we do to welcome and support migrants?

Prayer

Let us build a house
Where love can dwell
And all can safely live...
Built of hopes and dreams and visions. Amen.

8. Sharing the vision

Among the Eastern Churches those in full communion with the Successor of Peter enjoy a liturgical, theological, ecclesiological and canonical distinctiveness that greatly enriches the whole Church. In particular, their experience of unity in diversity can make a valuable contribution to the understanding and practice of synodality... The substantial migration of faithful from the Catholic East into Latin-majority territories raises important pastoral questions... There is a need for the local Latin-rite Churches, in the name of synodality, to help the Eastern faithful who have emigrated to preserve their identity and cultivate their specific heritage, without undergoing processes of assimilation.

A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report.6



So much we share!

Photo: Sr Janet Fearn

Reflection

I believe we are moving forward in our relations with the Orthodox; they have the sacraments and apostolic succession... we are moving forward. What are we waiting for? For theologians to reach an agreement? That day will never come, I assure you, I'm sceptical. Theologians work well but remember what Athenagoras said to Paul VI: "Let's put the theologians on an island to discuss among themselves and we'll just get on with things!" I thought that this might not have been true, but [Ecumenical Patriarch] Bartholomew told me: "No, it's true, he said that". We mustn't wait. Unity is a journey we have to take, but we need to do it together. This is spiritual ecumenism: praying together, working together. There are so many works of charity, so much work.... Teaching together.... Moving forward together. This is spiritual ecumenism.

Pope Francis, 30 November 2014

Questions

- Do I know anybody from one of the Eastern Churches?
- Have I tried to learn about the things that we do differently, such as the way in which we make the Sign of the Cross, fast during Lent and Advent, and celebrate Christmas and Easter on different dates?
- Does my parish help Eastern Christians to express their faith and cultural identity?

Prayer

Gracious and loving God, expand our vision that we might see the mission we share with all of our Christian brothers and sisters.

Help us to welcome our neighbours as your Son welcomed us.

Help us to be more generous. Amen.

9. Working together

Ecumenism is first and foremost a matter of spiritual renewal that also requires processes for repentance and healing of memory. The Assembly was moved to hear testimonies of Christians of different ecclesial traditions who share friendship, prayer and above all a commitment to the service of those experiencing poverty. Dedication to the least of these cements bonds and helps us focus on what already unites all believers in Christ. Therefore, it is important that ecumenism is practised first and foremost in daily life. In theological and institutional dialogue, the patient weaving of mutual understanding continues in an atmosphere of growing trust and openness...

Collaboration among all Christians is crucial in addressing the pastoral challenges of our time. In secularized societies, this enables the voice of the Gospel to have greater force. In contexts of poverty, it impels people to join forces in the service of justice, peace and the dignity of the least. In all instances, it is a resource for healing the culture of hatred, division and war that pits groups, peoples and nations against each other.

A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report.7



There is only one God!

Photo: © Mazur/cbcew.org.uk

Reflection

This year too we are called to pray, that all Christians may return to being one family, consistent with the divine will that “they may all be one” (Jn 17:21).

Ecumenism is not an optional thing. The intention will be that of maturing a common and universal witness in the affirmation of true justice and in support of the weakest, through concrete, appropriate and effective responses.

Pope Francis, 16 January 2019

Questions

- How active is my local Churches Together? Do I take part in any of the activities?
- How does my parish work with couples where husband and wife belong to different Christian churches?
- Where Christians have been martyred together, do I focus only on the Catholic martyrs and forget about “the others”?
- Could the local Churches Together meet to celebrate occasions of “shared martyrdom”?

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, at your Last Supper you prayed to the Father that all should be one. Send your Holy Spirit upon all who bear your name and seek to serve you. Strengthen our faith in you and lead us to love one another in humility. May we who have been reborn in one baptism be united in one faith under one Shepherd. Amen.

PART II: ALL DISCIPLES, ALL MISSIONARIES

10. The Church is mission

The family is the pillar of every Christian community. Parents and grandparents and all those who live and share their faith in the family are the first missionaries...

If the mission is a grace involving all the Church, the lay faithful contribute in a vital way to advancing that mission in all areas and in the ordinary situations of every day. Above all, it is they who make the Church present and who proclaim the Gospel, for example, in digital culture, which has such a strong impact throughout the world; in youth culture; in the world of work and business, politics, and the arts and culture; in scientific research, education, and training; in the care of our common home; and especially through participation in public life. Wherever they are present, they are called to witness to Jesus Christ in daily life and to explicitly share the faith with others. In a special way, young people, with their gifts and fragilities, growing in friendship with Jesus, become apostles of the Gospel to their peers.

The lay faithful are also increasingly present and active in service within Christian communities...

In their immense variety, the charisms of the laity represent distinct gifts to the Church from the Holy Spirit that must be called forth, recognised, and fully appreciated...

The mission ad gentes [to peoples] is mutually enriching for the Churches because it not only involves the missionaries themselves but the entire community, which in this way is inspired to prayer, the sharing of goods, and witness.

A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report.8



These very early morning pilgrims had travelled to Compostela. Where is my life journey taking me?
Photo: Sr Janet Fearn

Reflection

Now is the time for pastors and laypersons to move forward together, in every sphere of the Church's life and in every part of the world! The lay faithful are not "guests" in the Church; it is their home and they are called to care for it as such. Laypersons, and women in particular, must be better appreciated for the skills and for the human and spiritual gifts they bring to the life of parishes and dioceses. They can assist, with their "everyday" language, in the proclamation of the Gospel by engaging in various forms of preaching. They can cooperate with priests in training children and young people, helping engaged couples in preparation for marriage, and accompanying couples in marital and family life. They should always be consulted whenever new pastoral initiatives are planned at all levels, local, national and universal. They should be given a voice in the pastoral councils of the particular Churches and should be present in diocesan offices. They can assist in the spiritual accompaniment of other laypersons and contribute to the training of seminarians and religious... Together with their pastors, laypersons must bring Christian witness to secular life: to the worlds of work, culture, politics, art and social communications.

We could put it this way: laity and pastors together in the Church, laypersons and pastors together in the world.

Pope Francis, 18 February 2023

Questions

- Could my parish highlight the importance of reading at Mass and other occasions by formally establishing the Ministry of Lector?
- Do the people who read at Mass also help in other ways?
- If there is a Eucharistic Service because a priest is not available, does someone preach? Could this be included in the Ministry of Lector?
- Could other ministries in my parish also be acknowledged liturgically?

Prayer

Lord, teach me to be generous. Teach me to serve you as you deserve; to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to toil and not to seek for rest, to labour and not to ask for reward, save that of knowing that I do your will. Amen.

11. Uniquely women in the Church

Women make up most of those in our pews and are often the first missionaries of the faith in the family. Consecrated women, both in contemplative and apostolic life, are a fundamental and distinctive gift, sign and witness in our midst. The long history of women missionaries, saints, theologians and mystics is also a powerful source of nourishment and inspiration for women and men today...

The Assembly asks that we avoid repeating the mistake of talking about women as an issue or a problem. Instead, we desire to promote a Church in which men and women dialogue together, in order to understand more deeply the horizon of God's project, that sees them together as protagonists, without subordination, exclusion and competition.

A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report.9



Where would the world be without a woman's unique giftedness? Photo: Sr Janet Fearn

Reflection

In the history of salvation, it was a woman who welcomed God's Word. Women too kept alive the flame of faith in the dark night, awaiting and then proclaiming the resurrection. Women find deep and joyful fulfilment in precisely these two acts: welcoming and proclaiming. They are the protagonists of a Church that goes forth, listening and caring for the needs of others, capable of fostering true processes of justice and bringing the warmth of a home to the various social environments where they find themselves. Listening, reflection and loving activity: these are the elements of a joy ever renewed and shared with others through feminine insight, the care of creation, the gestation of a more just world, and the creation of a dialogue that respects and values differences.

Pope Francis, 7 October 2020

Questions

- What can I do to help women to be treated with greater respect, equality and dignity?
- What can my parish and I do to help women living on the margins of society?
- Are women given a role in decision-making in my parish? Why?

Prayer

Hail, Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

12. Following the call

The Church's charismatic dimension is made manifest in the rich and varied forms of consecrated life... The diverse families that compose religious life demonstrate the beauty of discipleship and holiness in Christ, whether in their distinctive forms of prayer, their service among the people, whether through forms of community life, the solitude of the contemplative life or at the frontier of new cultures...

With equal gratitude, the People of God recognise the seeds of renewal in communities with a long history that has blossomed into new ecclesial communities. Lay associations, ecclesial movements and new communities are a precious sign of the maturation of the co-responsibility of all the baptised. They hold particular value because of their experience in promoting communion among different vocations, the impetus with which they proclaim the Gospel, their proximity to those on the margins economically and socially and through their promotion of the common good.

A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report. 10



All that I am and all that I have...

Photo: FMDM

Reflection

You too, dear consecrated brothers and sisters, you are simple men and women who caught sight of the treasure worth more than any worldly good. And so, you left behind precious things, such as possessions, such as making a family for yourselves. Why did you do this? Because you fell in love with Jesus, you saw everything in him, and enraptured by his gaze, you left the rest behind. Religious life is this vision. It means seeing what really matters in life. It means welcoming the Lord's gift with open arms, as Simeon did. This is what the eyes of consecrated men and women behold: the grace of God poured into their hands. The consecrated person is one who every day looks at himself or herself and says: "Everything is gift, all is grace". Dear brothers and sisters, we did not deserve religious life; it is a gift of love that we have received.

Pope Francis, 1 February 2020

Questions

- What is my understanding of religious life today?
- How do men and women living as religious or as members of other communities speak to the challenges of today's society?
- What is the relationship between my parish and religious communities? Do I feel welcomed? Why?

Prayer

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding and my entire will, all I have and call my own. You have given all to me. To you, Lord, I return it. Everything is yours; do with it what you will. Give me only your love and your grace, that is enough for me.

13. Called to serve

Deacons and priests engage in ministry in a wide variety of pastoral settings: in parishes, in evangelisation, among those living in poverty and who are marginalized, in the world of culture and education, as well as in the mission ad gentes, in theological research, at retreat centres and places of spiritual renewal, and many others. In a synodal Church, ordained ministers are called to live their service to the People of God in a disposition of proximity to people, welcoming and listening to all, while cultivating a deep personal spirituality and a life of prayer. Above all, they are required to reconsider the exercise of authority, modelling it upon Jesus, who, "though he was in the form of God, [...] emptied himself, taking the form of a slave" (Phil. 2:6-7). The Assembly acknowledges that through their dedication many priests and deacons make Christ, the Good Shepherd and the Servant, present...

In order to exercise ordained ministry in a context of co-responsibility, it is necessary to be aware of one's own capacities and limitations. For this reason, it is important to ensure that a realistic approach to human formation is integrated with the cultural and spiritual dimensions of formation, as well as formation for discipleship.

A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report. 11



Bringing us closer to the Lord

Photo: Jesuit Refugee Service

Reflection

A priest needs to have a heart sufficiently “enlarged” to expand and embrace the pain of the people entrusted to his care while, at the same time, like a sentinel, being able to proclaim the dawning of God’s grace revealed in that very pain. Embracing, accepting and showing his own impoverishment in closeness to the Lord is the best means to learn gradually how to embrace the neediness and pain that he encounters daily in his ministry, and thus to be conformed ever more closely to the heart of Christ. That, in turn, will prepare the priest for another kind of closeness: closeness

to the people of God. In closeness to God, the priest grows in closeness to his people; and conversely, in closeness to his people, he experiences closeness to his Lord.

Pope Francis, 17 February 2022

Questions

- What was the role of the deacon in the early Church?
- What is the role of the deacon in my parish? Why?
- How can the priest, deacon and parishioners best support each other?

Prayer

O Jesus, I recommend to you the priests dearest to me:
the priest who baptised me;
the priests who absolved me from my sins;
the priests at whose Masses I assisted and who gave me your Body and Blood in Holy Communion;
the priests who taught and instructed me;
all the priests to whom I am indebted in any other way (especially ...).
O Jesus, keep them all close to your heart,
and bless them abundantly in time and in eternity. Amen.

14. Leadership in service

The bishop is, in his Church, the one primarily responsible for proclaiming the Gospel and for the liturgy. He guides the Christian community and promotes pastoral care of those experiencing poverty and defence of the most vulnerable. As the visible principle of unity, he has, in particular, the task of discerning and coordinating the different charisms and ministries sent forth by the Spirit for the proclamation of the Gospel and the common good of the community...

Expectations of bishops are often very high, and many bishops spoke of feeling overburdened with administrative and legal commitments, which makes it difficult for them to fully realise their mission. The bishop also must come to terms with his own frailty and limitations and sometimes lacks the support he needs, whether human or spiritual. A certain sense of loneliness is not uncommon.

A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report. 12



Called to lead by service

Photo: © Mazur/catholicnews.org.uk

Reflection

In this Synod we have had the grace of listening to the voices of the poor and reflecting on the precariousness of their lives, threatened by predatory models of development. Yet precisely in this situation, many have testified to us that it is possible to look at reality in a different way, accepting it with open arms as a gift, treating the created world not as a resource to be exploited but as a home to be preserved, with trust in God... How many times, even in the Church, have the voices of the poor not been heard and perhaps scoffed at or silenced because they are inconvenient. Let us pray for the grace to be able to listen to the cry of the poor: this is the cry of hope of the Church. The cry of the poor is the Church's cry of hope. When we make their cry our own, we can be certain, our prayer too will reach to the clouds.

Pope Francis, 27 October 2019

Questions

- Do I ever think of encouraging the bishop when he's done a good job or, perhaps, needs support in a difficult situation?
- When do I expect the bishops to speak out on important issues in society?
- How might my parish and our bishop work more closely together?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, give our bishop holiness of life and wisdom to direct and guide our diocesan family so that we may grow in your love. Amen.

15. ...and the Pope

The synodal dynamic also sheds new light on the ministry of the Bishop of Rome... In such a vision, the Petrine ministry of the Bishop of Rome is intrinsic to the synodal

dynamic, as are the communal aspect that includes the whole People of God and the collegial dimension of the exercise of Episcopal ministry. Therefore, synodality, collegiality, and primacy refer to each other: primacy presupposes the exercise of synodality and of collegiality, just as both of them imply the exercise of primacy.

Promoting the unity of all Christians is an essential aspect of the ministry of the Bishop of Rome. The ecumenical journey has deepened understanding of the ministry of the Successor of Peter and must continue to do so in the future.

Responses to the invitation made by St John Paul II in the encyclical Ut unum sint, as well as the conclusions of ecumenical dialogues, can help the Catholic understanding of primacy, collegiality, synodality, and their mutual relationships.

A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report. 13



Everyone is important

Photo: Jesuit Refugee Service

Reflection

The fact that someone is Pope doesn't mean they lose their humanity. On the contrary, my humanity grows each day with God's holy and faithful people. Because being Pope is also a process. The person becomes aware of what it means to be a pastor. And in this process, he learns how to be more charitable, more merciful, and, above all, more patient, like God our Father, who is so patient.

I can imagine that at the beginning of their pontificate, all the Popes had this feeling of trepidation, apprehension, knowing that he will be judged harshly. For the Lord will ask us Bishops to give a serious account.

Pope Francis, 31 October 2023

Questions

- Who feels closer to my faith journey: the Pope or the cardinals? Why?

- Do I pray for the Pope?
- Does my parish offer opportunities to learn more about the activities and teachings of the Pope? Why?

Prayer

“Pray for the Pope ‘so that in the exercise of his mission, he may continue to accompany in the faith the flock entrusted to him by Jesus, always with the help of the Holy Spirit.’” Amen.

PART III: WEAVING BONDS, BUILDING COMMUNITIES

16. Learning to “become”

The Holy People of God is not only the object but is first and foremost the co-responsible subject of formation. The first formation, in fact, takes place in the family. It is here that we usually receive the first proclamation of the faith in the language – indeed in the dialect – of our parents and grandparents. Those who carry out a ministry in the Church must therefore intertwine their contribution with the wisdom of all the faithful People of God in a cooperation that is indispensable to the community...

Formation in a synodal key is meant to enable the People of God to live out their baptismal vocation fully, in the family, in the workplace, in ecclesial, social, and intellectual spheres. It is meant to enable each person to participate actively in the Church's mission according to his or her own charisms and vocation.

A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report.14



The village community

Photo: Sr Janet Fearn

Reflection

All of us, in life, need educators, mature, wise and balanced people who help us to grow in the family, in our studies, in work and in faith. Educators who encourage us to take the first steps in a new activity without being afraid of the obstacles and challenges to be faced; who spur us to overcome difficult moments; who exhort us to have trust in ourselves and in our teammates; who are beside us both in times of disappointment and of failure, and in those of joy and success.

Pope Francis, 20 May 2015

Questions

- Who sticks in my mind as my best teacher(s) in life and faith?
- Have I made use of opportunities for updating my knowledge and understanding? Why?
- What does my parish do to help? Could it expand its activities? Why?

Prayer

On this house your calling, Lord;
may it come to us each day.

On this house your calling, Lord;
may it come to lead the way.

Filling us with nobler yearnings, Lord,
calling us to live in you.

On this house your calling, Lord;
may it come each day anew.

17. Thinking and working together

We can only support others if we ourselves are undergoing conversion, both personal and communal... If we use doctrine harshly and with a judgmental attitude, we betray the Gospel; if we practise mercy "on the cheap", we do not convey God's love. The unity of truth and love implies bearing the difficulties of others, even making them our own, as happens between brothers and sisters...

Certain issues, such as those relating to matters of identity and sexuality, the end of life, complicated marital situations, and ethical issues related to artificial intelligence, are controversial not only in society, but also in the Church, because they raise new questions... It is important to take the time required for this reflection and to invest our best energies in it, without giving in to simplistic judgements that hurt individuals and the Body of the Church. Church teaching already provides a sense of direction on many of these matters, but this teaching evidently still requires translation into pastoral practice.

A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report.15



We need to think and work together

Photo: Sr Janet Fearn

Reflection

Against the resignation that like a negative undercurrent undermines our deepest relationships and divides us, Jesus tells us: Blessed are those who work for reconciliation. Blessed are those ready to dirty their hands so that others can live in peace. Blessed are those who try not to sow division. That is how the Beatitude teaches us to be peacemakers. It asks us to try to make ever greater room for the spirit of reconciliation in our midst. Do you want to be blessed? Do you want to be happy? Blessed are those who work so that others can be happy. Do you want peace? Then work for peace.

Pope Francis, 16 January 2018

Questions

- What do you think are the most important doctrinal, pastoral and ethical issues for the Church to address today? Why?
- Can my parish help to clarify these issues?
- How can we address them?

Prayer

Most High, glorious God, enlighten the darkness of our minds.

Give us a right faith, a firm hope and a perfect charity, so that we may always, and in all things, act according to your holy Will. Amen.

18. Listen and accompany

This section is so rich that it deserves to be included in full. However, for reasons of conciseness, it is necessarily shortened. Please read the full text in the report.

The Church encountered many people and groups along the synodal process asking to be listened to and accompanied. We mention:

- *young people*
- *the voices of victims and survivors of sexual, spiritual, economic, institutional, power and conscience abuse by clergy members or persons with Church appointments*
- *all those who accept being alone as a choice made in fidelity to the Church's Tradition and Magisterium on marriage and sexual ethics*
- *people who feel marginalised or excluded from the Church because of their marriage status, identity or sexuality*
- *those who are or feel hurt or neglected by the Church*
- *people who suffer the many different forms of poverty, exclusion and marginalisation within our unequal societies*
- *those who are in prison*
- *the lonely, elderly and the sick*
- *everyone, not just those who can most easily make their voices heard*
- *[people] living under oppressive and dictatorial regimes*

A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report. 16



Do I walk past or do I listen?

Photo: Sr Janet Fearn

Reflection

We all have ears, but very often we are not able to hear. Why is this? Brothers and sisters, there is an interior deafness that we can ask Jesus to touch and heal today. It is interior deafness, which is worse than physical deafness, because it is the deafness of the heart. Taken up with haste, by so many things to say and do, we do not find time to stop and listen to those who speak to us. We run the risk of becoming impervious to everything and not making room for those who need to be heard. I am thinking about children, young people, the elderly, the many who do not really need words and sermons, but to be heard... The healing of the heart begins with listening.

Questions

- Do I feel heard by the people in my parish?
- Do I listen to people whom I would ordinarily dismiss?
- Who are the listeners in my parish? Do we support them?
- What would need to change for those who feel excluded to experience the Church and my parish as more welcoming?

Prayer

Walk with me, O my Lord,
Through the darkest night and brightest day.
Be at my side, O Lord,
Hold my hand and guide me on my way.
Conquer, my living Lord, the storms that threaten me.

19. Digital missionaries

Digital culture represents a fundamental change in the way we conceive of reality and consequently relate to ourselves, one another, our surroundings, and even to God. The digital environment changes our learning processes as well as our perception of time, space, our bodies, interpersonal relationships and, indeed, much of our way of thinking...

Digital culture, then, is not so much a distinct area of mission as a crucial dimension of the Church's witness in contemporary culture.

We cannot evangelise digital culture without first understanding it. Young people, and among them, seminarians, young priests, and young consecrated men and women, who often have profound and direct experience of it, are best suited to carry out the Church's mission in the digital environment, as well as to accompany the rest of the community, including pastors, in becoming more familiar with its dynamics.

A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report. 17



The world is a fascinating place Photo: Sr Janet Fearn

Reflection

The internet, with its countless social media expressions, can increase the capacity for reporting and sharing, with many more eyes on the world and a constant flood of images and testimonies. Digital technology gives us the possibility of timely first-hand information that is often quite useful. We can think of certain emergency situations where the internet was the first to report the news and communicate official notices. It is a powerful tool, which demands that all of us be responsible as users and consumers... Thanks to the internet we have the opportunity to report what we see, what is taking place before our eyes, and to share it with others... All of us are responsible for the communications we make, for the information we share, for the control that we can exert over fake news by exposing it. All of us are to be witnesses of the truth: to go, to see and to share.

Pope Francis, 23 January 2021

Questions

- Do I enjoy or feel threatened by the digital culture which so many people, especially the young, accept as part of their daily life? Why?
- Am I curious about the possibilities of a world I might not understand?
- Do I consider myself to be a “digital missionary”?
- How can my parish identify and encourage digital missionaries?

Prayer

Lord, teach us to move beyond ourselves, and to set out in search of truth. Grant us the grace to recognise your dwelling places in our world and the honesty needed to tell others what we have seen. Amen.

20. Communion, participation, mission

As members of the faithful People of God, all the baptised are co-responsible for mission, each according to his or her vocation, competence and experience. Therefore, all contribute to imagining and discerning steps to reform Christian communities and the Church as a whole. In this way, the Church experiences "the sweet and comforting joy of evangelising." The purpose of synodality, in the composition and functioning of the bodies in which it takes shape, is mission...

The People of God are all the more missionary when they can make the voices of those already living the mission by inhabiting the world and its peripheries resonate within themselves, including in participatory bodies.

A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report. 18



Where are we all going?

Photo: Sr Janet Fearn

Reflection

The urgency of the Church's missionary activity naturally calls for an ever-closer missionary cooperation on the part of all her members and at every level. This is an essential goal of the synodal journey that the Church has undertaken, guided by the key words: *communion, participation, mission*. This journey is certainly not a turning of the Church in upon herself; nor is it a referendum about what we ought to believe and practice, nor a matter of human preferences...

So let us set out once more, illumined by our encounter with the risen Lord and prompted by his Spirit. Let us set out again with burning hearts, with our eyes open and our feet in motion. Let us set out to make other hearts burn with the word of God, to open the eyes of others to Jesus in the Eucharist, and to invite everyone to walk together on the path of peace and salvation that God, in Christ, has bestowed upon all humanity.

Pope Francis, 6 January 2023

Questions

- Am I part of the discernment, planning and decision-making processes in my parish? Why?
- Does my parish try to listen to all the voices of the parishioners?
- What can we do to make the parish a truly listening, missionary community?

Prayer

Our Lady of the Way, Mother of Christ's missionary disciples and Queen of Missions, pray for us! Amen.

21. All for one and one for all

The Holy Spirit abundantly distributes his gifts for the common good, and so we are convinced that each Church, in the communion of the entire Church, has much to offer. When we view the Church as the Body of Christ, we understand more easily that the various members are interdependent and share the same life: "if one member suffers, all the members suffer together with it; and if one member is honoured, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor 12:26). We therefore want to develop the spiritual attitudes that arise from this outlook: humility and generosity, respect and sharing. Also important are the willingness to grow in mutual knowledge and to prepare the necessary structures so that the exchange of spiritual riches, missionary discipleship and material goods can become a concrete reality.

A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report. 19



May Mary help us on our journey.

Reflection

This is the Church's aim: to distribute throughout the world this new wine which is Christ. Nothing can divert us from this mission. We are in constant need of new wineskins (cf. Mk 2:22), and all that we do is never enough to make them worthy of the new wine which they are called to contain and to pour. But it is precisely for this reason that the containers need to know that without the new wine they will be cold earthenware jars, capable of remembering the absence but not of offering fullness. Please, may nothing divert you from this aim: to offer fullness!...

And here, each of us must humbly go deep within ourselves and ask ourselves what we can do to render more holy the face of the Church we govern in the name of the Supreme Shepherd... Here it is necessary to work together and in communion, certain, however that authentic sanctity is what God carries out within us when, docile to his Spirit, we return to the simple joy of the Gospel, so that his beatitude may become flesh for others, in our choices and in our lives.

Questions

- Do I make the effort to join initiatives in which my diocese joins with one or more others?
- Do my parish and diocese link with others, perhaps in other parts of this country, perhaps in other parts of the world? Why?
- Do we have joint initiatives between Churches of the Eastern and Latin Rites? Why?

Prayer

May Mary, who carries us without judging us, be the shining star that guides our journey. Amen.

22. Go forth in joy

Even when the experience of “walking together” has been tiring, the Assembly sensed the evangelical joy of being the People of God. The new experiences involved in this stage of the synodal journey were generally welcomed. The most obvious ones include the shift of the celebration of the Synod from an event to a process... the presence of other members, women and men, alongside the bishops; the active presence of fraternal delegates; the spiritual retreat in preparation for the Assembly; the celebration of the Eucharist at St. Peter’s; the atmosphere of prayer and the method of Conversation in the Spirit; and the very arrangement of the Assembly in the Paul VI Hall...

The synodal process was and is a time of grace which encourages us. God is offering us the opportunity to experience a new culture of synodality, capable of guiding the life and mission of the Church. We recalled, however, that it is not enough to create structures of co-responsibility if personal conversion to a missionary synodality is lacking. Synodal processes do not diminish the personal responsibility of those called to participate in it at every level of the Church by virtue of their ministry and charisms, but rather solicit it all the more.

A Synodal Church in Mission: Synthesis Report. 20



We walk together

Photo: Sr Janet Fearn

Reflection

This, brothers and sisters, is the Church we are called to “dream”: a Church that is the servant of all, the servant of the least of our brothers and sisters. A Church that never demands an attestation of “good behaviour,” but welcomes, serves, loves and forgives. A Church with open doors that is a haven of mercy. “The merciful man”, said John Chrysostom, “is as a harbour to those who are in need; and the harbour receives all who are escaping shipwreck, and frees them from danger, whether they be evil or good; whatsoever kind of men they be that are in peril, it receives them into its shelter. You also, when you see a man suffering shipwreck on land through poverty, do not sit in judgment on him, nor require explanations, but relieve his distress.”

Today we do not see the full fruit of this process, but with farsightedness we look to the horizon opening up before us. The Lord will guide us and help us to be a more synodal and missionary Church, a Church that adores God and serves the women and men of our time, going forth to bring to everyone the consoling joy of the Gospel.

Pope Francis, 29 October 2023

Questions

- What are my dreams for the Church?
- What are the dreams of my parish and my diocese?
- How can we make them happen?

Prayer

may we grow in our worship of God and in our service to our neighbour. To adore and to serve. May the Lord accompany us. Let us go forward with joy! Amen.