

## **Homily – Notes 17 October 2021**

### **Synod Opening Mass**

#### **Toward a Synodal Church: communion, participation and mission**

I offer these few ideas as Homily Notes for Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> October when Opening Masses for the Synod on the above topic will be celebrated throughout the dioceses of the world. Some clergy asked me to do this as they were uncertain about this particular Synod. You do not have to use these notes, but there may be some ideas here that will help.

By the 17<sup>th</sup> of October, Pope Francis will have celebrated the Mass on the 10<sup>th</sup> of October in Rome. You may like to go online to look at his homily and get some further ideas as to what synodality is and what this process of synodality is for the next couple of years leading up to the actual Synod in Rome.

I suggest that the readings of the day are used unless we get further instruction from Rome about other readings to be used. I also suggest that the prayer in the Roman Missal for a Council or a Synod is used [pg 1250 of the Missal].

If you wish the link to the speech Pope Francis gave to the Diocese of Rome on Synodality is:

<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/september/documents/20210918-fedeli-diocesiroma.html>

With all good wishes and blessings

+ John

**Homily Notes**

I (+John Dew) was very privileged to be at both sessions of the Synod on the Family which was the first Synod that Pope Francis called after his election in 2013. There was a session in 2014 for 3 weeks and a second session in 2015 for three weeks. During the 2015 session it happened to be the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of the Synod of Bishops which came out of the Second Vatican Council. I remember very clearly two things Pope Francis said that day in his speech, although I have since reread this speech many times.

The first was **“The only authority we have, is the authority of service”**. I have referred to that quote many times. It is not a title that gives me, or any other bishop or priest, any authority. It is not what we wear, or what academic credentials we have, the only authority any of us have is the authority of service.

The second quote was **“the path of synodality is the path God expects of the Church of the third Millennium”**. I didn’t fully understand at the time what that meant, now I have a much better idea. Synodality is about walking together, all of us, Pope, bishops, priests, men and women, young people, people of all ages and nationalities, walking together with our God. It is about all the people of God being together in support of one another on the journey and listening attentively to one another.

There is a wonderful piece in Pope Francis’ first exultation ***Evangelii Gaudium*** in which he says, **“the people of God, all the baptised whatever their position in the church or their level of instruction in the faith are agents of Evangelization – it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals, while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients”**. (E G 9) None of us want the people of God to be

passive recipients and I am sure that while we want to work professionally, we don't want to be working alone and leaving the people to be passive recipients.

There have been many synods in Rome, for regions throughout the world, Africa, America, Europe, Asia, Oceania<sup>9</sup> 1998). The Synods have been on various topics.....the priesthood, on family and marriage, on the role of Bishops, Religious Life, Evangelization, and many others. Those synods have all produced many documents usually known as Apostolic Exhortations.

The next Synod is about synodality, it is about all the people of God walking and working together. The document given to the world in preparation for this synod says, ***“the people of God in mass meetings at parishes and across diocese around the world, are being given the ability to imagine a different future for the Church, her institutions, in keeping with the mission she has received”***.

Those words offer a wonderful opportunity for everyone to have their say on imagining a different future for the Church. A few weeks ago Pope Francis spoke to the people of the Diocese of Rome about the synod process. He said, ***“To return to the synodal process, the diocesan phase is very important, since it involves listening to all the baptized, the subject of the infallible sensus fidei in credendo. There is a certain resistance to moving beyond the image of a Church rigidly divided into leaders and followers, those who teach and those who are taught; we forget that God likes to overturn things: as Mary said, “he has thrown down the rulers from their thrones but lifted up the lowly” (Lk 1:52). Journeying together tends to be more horizontal than vertical; a synodal Church clears the horizon where Christ, our sun, rises, while erecting monuments to hierarchy covers it. Shepherds walk with their***

***people: we shepherds walk with our people, at times in front, at times in the middle, at times behind.'***

Bishops and priests do not treat people as passive recipients, we are not the professionals doing something for or to the people but, rather, with them.

The synod is a process, it is not a one- off meeting, it is a process of permanent conversion, a process of entering into new ways of thinking. The idea is to make all the people actors in the process of discerning the future of the Church. That is an exciting thing to do, making the People of God actors in this process rather than passive onlookers.

Some people become confused and think that synods are about changing Church teaching; they are not. They are always about how Church teaching can be lived and applied in the changing contexts of our lives today. Synods are not democratic consultations, they are rather about making sure that we are walking together, listening to one another, supporting, and encouraging one another, listening to the Holy Spirit who guides and directs us, allowing the Holy Spirit who is the soul of the Church to lead and guide us.

In his words to the Diocese of Rome on 18<sup>th</sup> September, Pope Francis said, ***"I came here to encourage you to take this synodal process seriously and to tell you that the Holy Spirit needs you. It is true: the Holy Spirit needs us. Listen to him by listening to each other. Leave no one behind or excluded. It will be good for the Diocese of Rome and for the whole Church, which is not strengthened simply by reforming structures (that is the great illusion!) or by giving instructions, offering retreats and conferences, by issuing guidelines and programmes. All those things are good, but as part of something else, namely our rediscovery that we are a people meant to walk together, with one another and with all humanity. A people that, here in Rome, embraces a***

***wide variety of communities and situations: an extraordinary treasure, in all its complexity! However, we need to pass beyond the 3 or 4 percent that are closest to us, to broaden our range and to listen to others; at times they may insult or dismiss you, but we need to hear what they are thinking, without trying to impose our own concerns: let the Spirit speak to us.”***

Please be as involved as you can in this synod process and help us all to ***“Imagine a different future for the Church.”***