



Vision for a Synodal Church

'What on earth does a synodal process mean and what difference could it possibly make?'

I am sure that this is a question that many will be asking themselves, both Priests and laity. The basic meaning of the word 'synodality' is 'journeying together.' So the vision is a Church in which all the baptised – laity, priests, religious and bishops – journey together in seeking the way forward as we respond to our common vocation as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ.

In the past the Church has been very hierarchical with those at the very top making all the decisions and handing them down to those below with little discussion or consultation, particularly with those who were marginalised because of gender or social status. The great council of the modern Church, Vatican II, which took place in the 1960s, opened the possibility of changing the structures to allow for greater participation of the lay faithful in all aspects of Church life. The message and the model proposed by Vatican II has, to some degree, been very slow in getting off the ground. There have been great strides made at local level over the past 30 or 40 years but we still remain quite a hierarchical Church with limited formal channels for wider consultation and cooperation between bishops, clergy, religious and laity.

The synodal process, is a way of being Church where everyone walks the path together and that journey begins now.

Over the coming years there will be widespread consultation with everyone inside and outside the Church, those who are faithful and committed and those who have turned their backs and walked away. There will be much more information released as we go along, but the announcement is an exciting moment for all of us who value and love our Christian faith and who know the importance of the sacraments provided by the Church to nurture and nourish that faith.

It is important for all of us to realise that The Church will never be the same as it was. We are not trying to re-invent the Church of the past, but we are beginning a journey to somewhere new and, hopefully, to

somewhere where people can rediscover the joy of being part of the family of God.

There are three interrelated focal points for the upcoming Synod: communion, participation and mission. Let's begin with mission. The Church is not a club for the benefit of the members. Its basic reason for being is to continue the mission of Jesus Christ in our world. Jesus gave the gift of the Holy Spirit to the disciples so that they could be his witnesses. Engaging in the synodal process means trying to discover what the Spirit is doing in the ongoing mission of Jesus today and cooperating with that.

Mission and communion are inseparably connected. Communion has to do with how we relate to one another in the Church. If Christian mission is about the promotion of loving, compassionate, forgiving and just relationships, then we must be a sign of that by the way we relate to one another as Church.

In a world where people are often divided on the basis of class, culture and race, we need the witness of Christian communities in which people with different backgrounds, cultures and viewpoints can relate in a mutually enriching way. During this synodal process we open ourselves to the Spirit drawing us into open, hospitable communion, where all are included and each one's contribution is valued.

Where is the Spirit leading the Church today? It's a good question, and worth reflecting on.

In living our Christian life, we can so easily become disheartened, we can so easily forget the mission, the service and the life we are to give to the Lord. All our teaching, our healing, our reassuring, our supporting, our washing, our stewarding, our persisting and our encouraging, nothing is that ordinary when placed at the service of God and his people. The same Spirit can give us new hope and transform our world. Like the servants at the wedding feast in Cana, from today's Gospel, who knew where the wine had come from, we too need to keep our eyes fixed on him who is the source of our life.

Our hope is to be a listening Church in which everyone has something to learn. A synodal Church is a praying Church, open to hear the voice of the Spirit and aware of the prejudices and resistances which make us deaf to the Spirit. A synodal Church recognises and values different

roles in the Church where, in the words of Pope Francis, “the only authority is the authority of service.”

I pray that everyone will want to get involved in this great opportunity.

As you leave the Church today, you have the choice of either coming to a meeting, with a question that you can take from our Synod box in the porch of the Church. It is just one question for you to read, pray about and reflect. Then to bring your answer to a meeting, the dates and times will be published in next Sunday’s newsletter, and announced. Or if you don’t want to come to a meeting, then I ask you to take one of the questionnaires all of which can be found in the porch of the Church, pray before you answer the questions, reflect on the questions, allow the Holy Spirit to work in you, and when you feel ready to answer that questionnaire please return it over the next few weeks,

All this information can be found on the websites for all the Churches.

It will be interesting to listen to the hopes and fears, the joys and anxieties of all who are sharing their thoughts and feelings with us. God Bless and Thank You.

