

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B

Sunday, October 17, 2021

1. The disciples' request to be seated at either side of the Lord in his kingdom, opens an opportunity for Jesus to teach them how the Church is to be structured. Among the disciples it is not a relationship of dominance and power – but service. Authentic authority in the Christian community comes from service in imitation of the one who came to serve, not to be served. This kind of service is born of encounter – to meet people where they are at, and to walk with them, sometimes through difficult stuff. From that encounter we can learn to listen and to be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit.
2. Pope Francis has called the Church to enter a process of encounter with the people of our present day. It's been 60 years since the Second Vatican Council. In that time the church and the world have changed dramatically. The *Synod of Bishops* – a means of encounter which is the good fruit of the Council – has been called by Pope Francis to meet in 2023. The preparation for that Synodal meeting begins now – well in advance of the gathering in Rome. Today, in Cathedrals around the world, Bishops are embarking with their own dioceses on this Synodal path. What does it all mean for us? To describe the Church, the Second Vatican Council used several images: the *People of God*, a *Sheepfold*, a *vineyard*, the *building of God*, *our Mother*. [*Lumen Gentium*, #6] Today, we would add one of Pope Francis' favorite images of the Church – *a field hospital*. In the Council's Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, the Bishops teach that “The Church, while on earth, journeys in a foreign land away from the Lord, as in exile. It seeks and experiences those things which are above, where

Christ is seated at the right hand of God, where the life of the Church is hidden with Christ in God until it appears in glory with its Spouse” [LG #6]. After the Council and to further implement its teaching, an ancient form of meeting was recovered, the Synod of Bishops. The regular meetings of the Synod of Bishops have become an important part of the governance of the Church. Popes have called the Synod of Bishops together about every three years to reflect on some relevant topic. Pope Francis has called this Synod to begin working in each local Church – encountering, listening, and discerning. The fruit of the work will be shared with the Bishops’ Conference and then our national contribution to the Synod will be sent to Rome. Similar input from every part of the world will help to form the working document in preparation for the meeting of the Synod in 2023.

3. This Synod is an important opportunity for the Church at a critical time in our history and in the history of the world. The Pope invites all Catholics – even those who have fallen away from the Church – to walk the path of discernment together. The Synod will work by *encounter, listening, and discerning*. As part of the Synodal process, our encounter will be formed by prayer asking that the Holy Spirit open our hearts and guide our thoughts and actions. The fruit of this encounter is to listen to one another – not just hearing words – but as the Pope encourages – to form a listening heart. By listening in this way, we can make room for discernment – for the Holy Spirit to actively show us the way. The Pope reminds us that this process of encounter, listening and discerning always begins with the Lord. He assures us by saying that “even as we seek the Lord, He always comes with his love to meet us first.”

4. In the coming weeks and months, our Diocesan Synod team will invite parishioners, Catholics involved in education, healthcare, and charitable work; practicing and non-practicing Catholics, to respond to questions. As I described already the answers from across the Diocese will be collated and forwarded to the Bishops' Conference to form part of our Canadian response to be shared with Rome. You can imagine that this will be an enormous undertaking. Let us pray for a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit's gifts upon all those who will be involved at every level of preparation for the Synod and pray that this process will lead us closer to the Lord. The Letter to the Hebrews invites us to have confidence in the Lord. "Let us approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in this time of need." Pope Francis calls us to join him as pilgrims in love with the Gospel of Christ and open to surprises of the Holy Spirit along this holy way. May the Synod be a rich source of blessing for the Church and for each of us called to become beacons of light in a challenging time.