



Hope George Frederick Watts

The lithe figure of hope keeps appearing in the shadows of our daily lives, edging us toward the God drawing near. Leaning in hard on the inbreaking Spirit, we hasten to greet the dawn.

Colleen Griffiths in *Hope, Possibility & Fulfillment*. Ed Richard Lennan

OUR WORLD

For decades, it seemed that the world had learned a lesson from its many wars and disasters, and was slowly moving towards various forms of integration. For example, there was the dream of a united Europe our own days, however, seem to be showing signs of a certain regression. Ancient conflicts thought long buried are breaking out anew, while instances of a myopic, extremist, resentful and aggressive nationalism are on the rise.

Fratelli Tutti n 10-11

Pope Francis wrote *Fratelli tutti* in 2020. During an Angelus at the end of last month, he drew attention to many ongoing wars:

‘With a heart broken by what is happening in Ukraine - let us not forget the wars in other parts of the world, such as Yemen, Syria, Ethiopia. I repeat: put down your weapons! God is with the peacemakers, not with those who use violence,’

RESPONDING TO THE SIGNS OF THIS TIMES

In a recent statement about the war in Ukraine, Fr Tomas Halik, a Polish theologian wrote: *Pope Francis’ call to a synodal reform is to transform the Church from an institution ‘where we all march in lockstep’ into a network of mutual communication, a path of searching together for responses to the signs of our epochal times.’*

CALL TO BE A SYNODAL CHURCH

The process for the 2021 - 2023 Synod is well underway across the world. It is a massive undertaking of listening to well over a billion Catholics from around the world. The website <https://www.synod.va/en.html> gives some indication of the huge scope of the process.

FOLLOWERS OF THE WAY

The word ‘way’ occurs many times in the New Testament and especially in Mark’s Gospel. The Greek word ‘hodos’ translates as ‘way’ or ‘road’ and it identified the first Christians as followers of Jesus, or followers of the Way. In other words, those who chose the

path of discipleship with Jesus. The word ‘Synod’ carries this meaning of being together on the way. There are different roles in a Synod, but everyone is on the same journey.

CENTRALITY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The synodal process starts with the conviction that the Holy Spirit leads the Church. The language of Synod may be new to us in this millennium. It is, however, an ancient way of being Church from the earliest times.

Chapter 15 of the Acts of the Apostles describes a synodal process of the whole body being called together to listen and discern. Their decision is announced ...

...it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us....

Acts 15:28

A CHURCH WHICH LISTENS

In an address to mark the 50th anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, Pope Francis said:

A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realises that listening is more than simply hearing. It is mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. The faithful people, the college of bishops, the Bishop of Rome: all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth (Jn 14:17), in order to know what he says to the Churches (Rev 2:7).

All of the baptised are invited to participate. A Synodal Church comes into being through participation. The purpose of this Synod is to discern how the Church can be more missionary in the world in which we are now living. The Synod is not a parliament a contest of ideas or an opinion survey.

WE ARE ALL MISSIONARY DISCIPLES

In the *Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis writes that all of the People of God through baptism are missionary disciples. (EG n119)

In all the baptised, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelisation.... As part of his mysterious love for humanity, God furnishes the totality of the faithful with an instinct of faith – sensus fidei – which helps them to discern what is truly of God.

Very simply, participation in the Synod means having the confidence to speak and the humility to listen to others and the voice of the Holy Spirit.

It is also about courageously opening yourself to others who hold very different views to yours and may strongly disagree with you. Listening graciously includes imagining why others hold different views; what might their lives be like? What experiences have shaped their views? What might they be afraid of? Knowing your own fears.

BEING CHURCH TOGETHER

Becoming a synodal Church means recovering an understanding of how the Church operates that is clear from the Acts of the Apostles, when decisions were made involving the whole body of believers by first listening carefully at the margins. Being a synodal Church is also more than how we make decisions, it is how we are Church together with all of our differences.

Fr Tony Gittins writes in the *Way of Discipleship* that Jesus’ ministry is marked by ‘boundary-crossing’ outreach. Boundaries or margins serve a triple purpose: they are points of exclusion, encounter or connection.

A CULTURE OF ENCOUNTER

Lent can be a time to think about the simple beginning of radical change, one step at a time. A sense of mission begins in a personal encounter with God and the desire for others to know that same experience. In an address to the Bishops of Mexico in 2016, Pope Francis spoke about God’s power as the very fragility of God is God’s strength:

... that which delights and attracts, that which humbles and overcomes, that which opens and unleashes is not the power of instruments and the force of law, but rather the omnipotent weakness of divine love ...

TO LOVE, YOU MUST ENCOUNTER

Viktor Frankl

RAVENSBRUCK WOMEN’S PRAYER*

O Lord, remember not only men and women of good will, but also those of ill will.

But do not remember all the suffering they inflicted on us. Remember the fruits we have born thanks to this suffering: our comradeship, our humility, our courage, our generosity, the greatness of heart which has grown out of this; and when they come to judgement let all the fruits we have born be their forgiveness.

** Ravensbruck was a women’s concentration camp during World War II*