



*Stand at the crossroads, and look, and ask for the ancient paths,
where the good way lies; and walk in it, and find rest for your souls*

Jeremiah 6:16

A PEOPLE ON THE WAY

The first Assembly of Australia's fifth Plenary Council concluded last Sunday. The second Assembly will be in July 2022. In Rome, a Synod on Synodality is preparing to begin a global process that will continue until 2023.

Both continue a process of renewal that began with the Second Vatican Council, 59 years ago on 11 October. Both are following the ancient process of Synodality that is also new for the Church in 21st century. The Synod on Synodality will be Pope Francis' fourth Synod. The previous three were on the Family, on Young People and on Amazonia.

Synodality starts with hearing from the whole People of God. A Church that teaches must be firstly a Church that listens. The Master is a good master because he knew how to be a good disciple (Philippians 2:6-11). Consulting all members of the Church is vital because, as the Second Vatican Council reminded us, the faithful as a whole are anointed by the Holy Spirit and "cannot err in matters of belief."

What characterises a synodal path is the role of the Holy Spirit. We listen, we discuss in

groups, but above all pay attention to what the Spirit has to say to us.

Pope Francis *Let Us Dream* pp 84, 85

WALKING TOGETHER - SYNOD

The word 'synod' has deep roots within the Christian tradition. It is a two part Greek word meaning walking together. From the Gospels, it is clear that Jesus often taught his disciples as they journeyed together. They became known as followers of The Way.

The well known story in Luke of the two disciples journeying to Emmaus after Jesus' death, is an example of how the first disciples experienced Jesus continuing to walk with them. They also remembered Jesus' promise, recorded in John's Gospel (14:16) that he would send his Spirit to be with them forever.

The pattern of gathering together in prayer, listening to each other and to the Holy Spirit was very much part of forming decisions in the first centuries of the Church. Such as in Acts 15: 1-35: *For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us....* (v 28)

In the second century, Ignatius of Antioch called his fellow Christians 'companions on the journey'

POPE FRANCIS' HOMILY FOR THE OPENING OF THE SYNODAL PATH 10 October 2021 Mark 10:17-30

Today, as we begin this synodal process, let us begin by asking ourselves - all of us, Pope, bishops, priests, religious and laity - whether we, the Christian community, embody this "style" of God, who travels the paths of history and shares in the life of humanity. Are we prepared for the adventure of this journey? Or are we fearful of the unknown, preferring to take refuge in the usual excuses: "It's useless" or "We've always done it this way"?

Celebrating a Synod means walking on the same road, walking together. Let us look at Jesus. First, he **encounters** the rich man on the road; he then **listens** to his questions, and finally he helps him **discern** what he must do to inherit eternal life. **Encounter, listen and discern**. I would like to reflect on these three verbs that characterize the Synod.

As we initiate this process, we too are called to become experts in the **art of encounter**. Not so much by organising events or theorising about problems, as in taking time to encounter the Lord and one another. Time to look others in the eye and listen to what they have to say, to build rapport, to be sensitive to the questions of our sisters and brothers, to let ourselves be enriched by the variety of charisms, vocations and ministries. Every encounter, as we know, calls for openness, courage and a willingness to let ourselves be challenged by the presence and the stories of others....

Let us ask ourselves frankly during this synodal process: **Are we good at listening?** How good is the "hearing" of our heart? Do we allow people to express themselves, to walk in faith even though they have had difficulties in life, and to be part of the life of the community without being hindered, rejected or judged? Participating in a Synod means placing ourselves on the same path as the Word made flesh. It means following in his footsteps, listening to his word along with the words of others. It means discovering with amazement that the Holy Spirit always surprises us, to suggest fresh paths and new ways of speaking. It is a slow and perhaps tiring exercise, this learning to listen to one another - bishops, priests, religious and laity, all the baptized - and to avoid artificial and shallow and pre-packaged responses. The Spirit asks us to listen to the questions, concerns and hopes of every Church, people and nation. And to listen to the world, to the challenges and changes that it sets before us. Let us not soundproof our hearts; let us not remain barricaded in our certainties. So often our certainties can make us closed. Let us listen to one another.

Finally, **discern**. Encounter and listening are not ends in themselves, leaving everything just as it was before. On the contrary, whenever we enter into dialogue, we allow ourselves to be challenged, to advance on a journey. And in the end, we are no longer the same; we are changed. We see this in today's Gospel. Jesus senses that the person before him is a good and religious man, obedient to the commandments, but he wants to lead him beyond the mere observance of precepts.

Through dialogue, he helps him to discern. Jesus encourages that man to look within, in the light of the love that the Lord himself had shown by his gaze (cf. v. 21), and to discern in that light what his heart truly treasures. And in this way to discover that he cannot attain happiness by filling his life with more religious observances, but by emptying himself.

Here is a valuable lesson also for us. The Synod is a process of spiritual discernment, of ecclesial discernment, that unfolds in adoration, in prayer and in dialogue with the word of God. Today's second reading tells us that God's word is "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (*Heb4:12*). That word summons us to discernment and it brings light to that process. It guides the Synod, preventing it from becoming a Church convention, a study group or a political gathering, a parliament, but rather a grace-filled event, a process of healing guided by the Spirit. In these days, Jesus calls us, as he did the rich man in the Gospel, to empty ourselves, to free ourselves from all that is worldly, including our inward-looking and outworn pastoral models; and to ask ourselves what it is that God wants to say to us in this time. And the direction in which he wants to lead us.

Dear brothers and sisters, let us have a good journey together! May we be pilgrims in love with the Gospel and open to the surprises of the Holy Spirit. Let us not miss out on the grace-filled opportunities born of encounter, listening and discernment. In the joyful conviction that, even as we seek the Lord, he always comes with his love to meet us first.

Full text: <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2021/documents/20211010-omelia-sinodo-vescovi.html>

In the decision to begin the journey of the Plenary Council, in all that has happened since then and in the assembly of this last week, we have sought to be wise - though not as the world is wise. We have sought to be wise with the wisdom of God, the wisdom that comes from on high. This is no abstract wisdom, but in the Bible becomes a 'she'. It is a wisdom that is not simply known and understood but a wisdom which is loved: 'I have loved her more than health or beauty' we have heard, 'I preferred her to the light'. It is a wisdom which takes flesh.

Christians have often seen this heavenly wisdom as the Holy Spirit, moving among us, entering the flesh of the Church and the flesh of our lives... Without the Holy Spirit there would be no Council

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<https://plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au/>