



Discernment is a grace...
Gaudete et Exsultate n170

PREPARATION FOR THE SYNOD 2021-2023

Pope Francis opened the global Synod in his eighth year as Pope. Yet, in reality, he has been preparing all of us for the Synod from the moment he stepped onto the Vatican balcony in 2013. He then refused elaborate vestments, greeted everyone informally and bowed to receive the requested blessings of the pilgrim people of God, before offering the world his blessing as Pope.

Our preparation has continued through his encyclicals, apostolic letters, audiences and messages. Most profoundly, he has prepared us with his gestures of leadership such as washing the feet of prisoners, caring for the homeless in Rome, visiting refugee camps and in his ninth year as Pope publishing the document that details the work of many years to reform the Vatican Curia. This document places evangelisation as the first priority, which includes the whole Church and is served by other sections of the Vatican Curia. All that Pope Francis has put in place since 2013 has brought us to the Global Synod of 2021-2022.

THE SYNODAL PROCESS

The preparation document for the Synod at <https://www.synod.va/en.html> states:

The Synodal Process is first and foremost a spiritual process. It is not a mechanical data gathering exercise or a series of meetings and debates. Synodal listening is oriented towards discernment. It requires us to learn and exercise the art of personal and communal discernment.

LISTENING, DISCERNMENT & PARTICIPATION

Listening to others, especially those who have been hurt or discouraged by the Church, listening to what is happening in our local neighbourhoods and in our world are the first necessary steps to prayerful discernment. Participation in listening and discernment are essential to participation on the path to being a Synodal Global Church.

In a homily as part of the launch of Synod 2021-2023 in Brisbane, Archbishop Mark Coleridge stated:

"Discernment is slow and messy; dictatorship is always quicker and cleaner. Through much of the

last millennium the Catholic Church moved increasingly to a monarchical understanding and practice of papal and episcopal ministry ... It's striking now how Pope Francis, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, is doing all he can to dismantle the monarchical papacy ... part of this dismantling is to stress that all the baptised have a voice in the Church, all have responsibility for mission.

In baptism we all share in the kingly, prophetic and priestly life of Christ. This is an incredible challenge for Catholics worldwide, as we live in such diverse cultures, geographical settings, levels of economic security, faith and social experiences.

However, this is more than everyone simply having a say. The invitation to prayerful discernment demands engaging in the process Pope Francis describes in *Let Us Dream The Path to a Better Future*. (Available in the Piety Shop) 'It is time to see, time to choose and time to act.'

DISCERNMENT

For many people, discernment is a way of living by learning to listen for the voice of God present to us in prayer, in Scripture, in our own hearts, in the lives of others and in the events of each day. If we live in privileged circumstances, it can be a challenge to 'see' with the eyes of, for example, people living in poverty and refugees to name some others.

In *Gaudete et Exsultate*, Pope Francis devotes a large part of chapter five to discernment. He writes:

Discernment is a grace ... it involves more than my temporal well-being, my satisfaction at having accomplished something useful, or even my desire for peace of mind ... it requires no special abilities, nor is it only for the more intelligent or better educated. n 170

One of many Jesuit online discernment resources is available at:

<https://thejesuitpost.org/2021/11/jesuit-101-finding-our-way-through-ignatian-discernment/>

Good Samaritan Sister, Clare Condon wrote recently:

He [Pope Francis] states that some realities militate against his kind of seeing from the edge, which can hinder the walking together, the listening and discernment. He names these as narcissism, discouragement, indifference and pessimism, holding on to something we are

afraid to let go of, and ideology, i.e. creating our own prism through which we judge everything. He also emphasises that integral ecology is at the margins and the earth is pleading for our response.

A SPIRITUAL PROCESS LED BY THE HOLY SPIRIT

Fr Denis Edwards wrote in *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* that many Christians think of the Holy Spirit as coming at Pentecost, with little sense of the Spirit's work in creation, grace and incarnation. He suggested that a rediscovery of the much bigger story of the Spirit is needed.

Throughout the Vatican documents on the Synod is the reminder that the Holy Spirit leads the Synod and that we are all pilgrims and servants on the path marked out for us by God. We are clay in the hands of the divine Potter (Isaiah 64:)

A helpful list of pitfalls to avoid includes:

- The temptation of wanting to lead ourselves instead of being led by God.
- The temptation to focus on ourselves and our immediate concerns.
- The temptation to only see "problems"
- The temptation of focusing only on structures.
- The temptation not to look beyond the visible confines of the Church.
- The temptation to lose focus of the objectives of the Synodal Process.
- The temptation of conflict and division.
- The temptation to treat the Synod as a kind of parliament.

Discernment engages us in the dance to the music of the Spirit. It puts us in touch with the Spirit of God ... who invites us to cooperate in the creation of a world made in the image of God.

Listening to the Music of the Spirit
David Lonsdale SJ