



Plenary Council 2020

'Listen to what the Spirit is saying...' REV 2:7

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DIOCESAN FORUM
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What is synodality...in practice?

James McEvoy
Australian Catholic University, Adelaide

Synod

Gk: *σύννοδος* **syn odos** – travel together – assembly / meeting

From early Christian times...

c.50 CE – the early community gathered in Jerusalem to discern whether the practice of circumcision was necessary for Gentile Christians
“It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves...” (Acts 15:28)

We hear about a synodal life in the church in Asia Minor
from mid-late 2nd century

Church: the people of God (Vatican II)

Vatican II renewed the understanding of the church as the people of God (*LG 9–12*)

- “The church is far more than an organic and hierarchical institution. It is above all the people of God on their way to God, a pilgrim and evangelizing people that transcends every (however necessary) institutional expression. ...
- “Through the Spirit, God draws us to himself, not as isolated individuals, but as a people. So the church can be the renegotiated place of mercy, where all can feel themselves welcomed and loved, where they experience pardon and can feel encouraged to live according to the good life of the gospel.”

Kasper, “Open House: How Pope Francis Sees the Church”

The people of God walking together

Pope Francis has spelled out Vatican II's vision of the church as the people of God in terms of **synodality**:

- “In a certain sense, what the Lord asks of us is already contained in the word ‘synod.’ Walking together—Laity, Pastors, the Bishop of Rome—is an easy concept to put into words, but not so easy to put into practice. ...
- “A synodal church is a listening church, knowing that listening ‘is more than feeling.’ It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn. Faithful people, the College of Bishops, the Bishop of Rome: we are one in listening to others; and all are listening to the Holy Spirit, the ‘Spirit of truth’ (Jn 14:17), to know what the Spirit is saying to the Churches’ (Rev 2:7).”

Pope Francis, “Pope Calls for a Listening Church”

Synodality – the framework for ministry

- “As a constitutive dimension of the Church, synodality gives us the more appropriate interpretive framework to understand the hierarchical ministry. If we understand as St John Chrysostom [347–407] did, that ‘church and synod are synonymous,’ since the Church means nothing other than the common journey of the Flock of God along the paths of history toward the encounter of Christ the Lord, then we understand that within the Church, no one can be raised up higher than the others. On the contrary, in the Church, it is necessary that each person be ‘lowered’ in order to serve his or her brothers and sisters along the way.” Francis

Kasper on post-Vatican II development

Vatican II's understanding of the collegiality of bishops, Diocesan Pastoral Councils, and Councils of Priests all laid the foundations for the further development of synodal life.

- “A more participatory and dialogical style would make the *communio* nature and universality of the church appear more visible, tangible, and trustworthy.”

Kasper, *The Catholic Church*, 273.

Synodality ... in practice

1. Synodality...*not simply another structure.*
 - Francis rejects “functionalism” in the church and church reform. ...only participation which engages people’s and concerns will overcome the current distrust in institutions.
2. Consultation at the *grassroots* – both of individuals and their associations
 - Goal: ascertaining people’s concerns and thus gaining their commitment to the process (“buy in”)
3. *The process of the synod / Plenary Council / assembly is, itself, open*
 - “The path is opened by walking”

Synodality ... in practice ...

4. Fundamental to synodality is *discernment of the sense of faith* of the people of God
 - A synodal church is a church that listens...
 - Discernment of the presence of the Holy Spirit relates to the concrete lives of individuals/community, “not a discernment of ideas” (Spadaro)
 - Speak candidly... “say all that, in the Lord, one feels the need to say”
 - Discernment is not dialectical or antagonistic parliamentary-style debate
 - Synod...*an ecclesial expression*. As a diocese, we are a community journeying together and, therefore, must start from where we are. We can't remake the church from scratch, nor fulfil the 'wish list' that each person might bring.



In conversation...

What's your response to Pope Francis's hope for a synodal church?

What do you imagine will be the greatest blessings and challenges of this synodal process—in the Plenary Council 2020, and in a Diocesan Assembly?

- Blessings...
- Challenges...

References:

Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel* (2013)

Pope Francis, "Pope Calls for a Listening Church," Address at the Commemorative Ceremony for the 50th Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, *America Magazine* (October 17, 2015).

Walter Kasper, *The Catholic Church: Nature, Reality, and Mission* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015)

Walter Kasper, "Open House: How Pope Francis Sees the Church," *Commonweal* (April 10, 2015)

Walter Kasper, *Pope Francis' Revolution of Tenderness and Love* (New York: Paulist, 2015).