

FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH: COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION, AND MISSION

Dear Parish Participants in the Diocesan Phase of the 2021–2023 Synod on Synodality,

Thank you for your involvement as we participate in this synodal process initiated for the Universal Church by the Holy Father, Pope Francis, and for our local Church by Bishop William P. Callahan. This consultation is part of a process that will lead up to the October 2023 Synod of Bishops, after which will be implemented the feedback from consultations such as these held throughout the world.



It should be noted from the outset that this process of listening and engaging is not about the teachings of the Church. Those will not change. Instead, it is about responding to Pope Francis' invitation to reflect on a theme integral to the Church's life and mission: *"It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium."* Those participating in this conversation will have an opportunity to respond to the fundamental question of how each of us, faithful to our vocations, walks together in a continuous dialogue of truth and love and in fulfillment of the Church's mission. This journey follows the Church's "renewal" proposed by the Second Vatican Council. By journeying together and reflecting together on the journey that has been made, the Church will be able to learn through her experience which processes can help her to live communion, to achieve participation, to open herself to mission. "Communion, participation and mission" are inseparable keys to this process and are to remain at the heart of our conversations throughout this process.

While this consultation is part of a specific process, our Church has always been synodal, including here in our diocese. Therefore, you are invited to see this as a dialogue begun for this Synodal Process, but also one that should be ongoing and continued, whether formally or informally, among individuals or groups.

While it is easy for us to reflect on the fundamental question that will be posed to us, let us remember that we do so in times of global tragedy, as evidenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Within this context, synodality represents the path by which the Church can be renewed by the action of the Holy Spirit, by listening together afresh to what God has revealed to us in Christ Jesus. It compels us to imagine the future of the Church and to be a prophetic witness to the human family, which needs to be united around a common goal. Thank you again for your participation.

[Text adapted from the Archdiocese of Baltimore]

A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening is more than simply hearing. It is a 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," in order to know what he "says to the Churches." Our gaze also extends to humanity as a whole. A synodal Church is like a standard lifted up among the nations in a world which—while calling for participation, solidarity and transparency in public administration—often consigns the fate of entire peoples to the grasp of small but powerful groups. As a Church which "journeys together" with men and women, sharing the travails of history, let us cherish the dream that a rediscovery of the inviolable dignity of peoples and of the function of authority as service will also be able to help civil society to be built up in justice and fraternity, and thus bring about a more beautiful and humane world for coming generations.

—Pope Francis, *Address of October 17, 2015*

WHAT IS SYNODALITY?

Throughout this process, we hear the words: *Synod*, *Synodality*, and *Synodal process*. What do these words mean? Do they mean the same thing? A helpful short definition of the “Synod of Bishops” is a gathering of bishops that:

1. Fosters closer unity between the bishops and Pope;
2. Provides counsel to the Pope on matters of faith and morals, and discipline of the Church; and
3. Studies questions concerning the Church in the world (c.f. *Code of Canon Law*, c. 342).

Voting in the Synod of Bishops assembly is limited to bishops present at the Synod gathering. However, clergy, men and women religious, theologians, catechists, canon lawyers, and lay experts all participate in the Synod gathering with bishops by providing their counsel.

Synodality and the Synodal process are not a gathering or meeting of bishops, nor are they the administrative arm of the Church. Rather, Synodality is the path and process of the Church as communion. It is the communion of all the baptized who are listening to each other, dialoguing with each other and praying together to hear the voice of Holy Spirit as we all seek holiness and proclaim the Gospel. Synodality involves clergy, religious, and laity listening and speaking, praying and discerning together, and placing the hopes and concerns of the People of God at the foot of the bishops, who, united with the Pope, decide matters of faith and morals in order to preserve the faith and strengthen the Church throughout the world.

“Synodality, in this perspective, is much more than the celebration of ecclesial meetings and bishops’ assemblies, or a matter of simple internal administration within the Church; it is ‘the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* [way of living and being] of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelizing mission” (*Preparatory Document*, no. 10). “In fact, this people, gathered together by its pastors, adheres to the sacred deposit of the Word of God entrusted to the Church, perseveres constantly in the teaching of the apostles, in fraternal communion, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer, ‘so that holding to, practicing, and professing the heritage of the faith, it becomes on the part of the bishops and faithful a single common effort” (*Preparatory Document*, no. 13). Synodality and the Synodal process are not about engaging others for the purpose of deciding matters through a parliamentary vote. Nor is the primary purpose of Synodality to introduce democratic methods into the Church, where the majority determines how the Church will act. Synodality is also not about promulgating strategic plans or managing pastoral parish ministries through objectives. Synodality is about the entire People of God journeying together to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to become holy.

“The Pastors, established by God as ‘authentic guardians, interpreters and witnesses of the faith of the whole Church,’ should not be afraid to listen to the flock entrusted to them. The consultation of the People of God does not imply the assumption within the Church of the dynamics of democracy based on the principle of majority, because there is, at the basis of participation in every Synodal process, a shared passion for the common mission of evangelization and not the representation of conflicting interests. In other words, this is an ecclesial process that can only take place ‘at the heart of a hierarchically structured community.’ Every Synodal process, in which the bishops are called to discern what the Spirit is saying to the Church, not by themselves but by listening to the People of God, who ‘shares also in Christ’s prophetic office’ (*LG*, no. 12), is an evident form of that “journeying together” which makes the Church grow” (*Preparatory Document*, no. 14 see also c.f. *Lumen Gentium*, no. 12; *CCC*, nos. 91–93).

As we embark on this Synodal process as the Diocese of La Crosse, let us remember the words of Saint Paul to the Thessalonians, “Do not quench the Spirit. Do not despise prophetic utterances. Test everything; retain what is good” (1 Thess. 5:19–21).

[Courtesy of the Archdiocese of Washington, DC]

KEY WORDS FOR THE SYNODAL PROCESS

In the ceremony to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the institution of the Synod of Bishops in October 2015, Pope Francis declared that “the world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission.” This call to cooperate in the mission of the Church is addressed to the entire People of God. Pope Francis made this clear when he issued a direct invitation to all the People of God to contribute to Church efforts towards healing: “every one of the baptized should feel involved in the ecclesial and social change that we so greatly need. This change calls for a personal and communal conversion that makes us see things as the Lord does.”

With this convocation, Pope Francis invites the entire Church to reflect on a theme that is decisive for its life and mission: “It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.” This journey, which follows in the wake of the Church’s “renewal” proposed by the Second Vatican Council, is both a gift and a task: by journeying together and reflecting together on the journey that has been made, the Church will be able to learn through her experience which processes can help her to live communion, to achieve participation, to open herself to mission. Our “journeying together” is, in fact, what most effectively enacts and manifests the nature of the Church as the pilgrim and missionary People of God.

The theme of the Synod is “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission.” The three dimensions of the theme are communion, participation, and mission. These three dimensions are profoundly interrelated. They are the vital pillars of a Synodal Church. There is no hierarchy between them. Rather, each one enriches and orients the other two. There is a dynamic relationship between the three that must be articulated with all three in mind.

■ **Communion:** By His gracious will, God gathers us together as diverse peoples of one faith, through the covenant that He offers to his people. The communion we share finds its deepest roots in the love and unity of the Trinity. It is Christ who reconciles us to the Father and unites us with each other in the Holy Spirit. Together, we are inspired by listening to the Word of God, through the living Tradition of the Church, and grounded in the *sensus fidei* that we share (that is, the supernatural appreciation of the faith shown by the universal consent in matters of faith and morals manifested by the whole body of the faithful under the guidance of the Magisterium). We all have a role to play in discerning and living out God’s call for His people.

■ **Participation:** A call for the involvement of all who belong to the People of God—laity, consecrated, and ordained—to engage in the exercise of deep and respectful listening to one another. This listening creates space for us to hear the Holy Spirit together, and guides our aspirations for the Church of the Third Millennium. Participation is based on the fact that all the faithful are qualified and are called to serve one another through the gifts they have each received from the Holy Spirit. In a synodal Church the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called together to pray, listen, analyze, dialogue, discern, and offer advice on making pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God’s will. Genuine efforts must be made to ensure the inclusion of those at the margins or who feel excluded.

■ **Mission:** The Church exists to evangelize. We can never be centered on ourselves. Our mission is to witness to the love of God in the midst of the whole human family. This Synodal Process has a deeply missionary dimension to it. It is intended to enable the Church to better witness to the Gospel, especially with those who live on the spiritual, social, economic, political, geographical, and existential peripheries of our world. In this way, synodality is a path by which the Church can more fruitfully fulfill her mission of evangelization in the world, as a leaven at the service of the coming of God’s kingdom.

MAIN QUESTIONS FOR CONSULTATION

Pope Francis has called the entire People of God to journey together! This Synod is a process of journeying together by listening, dialoguing, praying, and discerning for the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Pope Francis is asking each local diocese to listen to each other's joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties. The "goal" of this journeying together is not to create a new vision or pastoral plan with objectives. Rather, the goal of our journeying together is to be present with one another, to listen and learn with each other, and to grow closer to the Lord and His Church.

The Synod poses the following fundamental questions: *A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, "journeys together." How does this "journeying together" take place today on different levels in the Church (from the local level to the universal one), allowing her to proclaim the Gospel? What steps is the Holy Spirit inviting us to take in order to grow in our "journeying together"?*

In responding to these questions, you are invited to:

- Recall your experiences:
 - What experiences of our diocese or parish do these questions call to mind?
- Re-read these experiences in greater depth:
 - What joys did they bring?
 - What difficulties and obstacles have they encountered?
 - What wounds did they reveal?
 - What insights have they elicited?
- Gather the fruits to share:
 - Where in these experiences does the voice of the Holy Spirit resound?
 - What is the Spirit asking of us?
 - What are the points to be confirmed, the prospects for change, the steps to be taken?
 - Where do we register a consensus?
 - What paths are opening up for our diocese or parish?

To help explore these fundamental questions more fully, the following themes highlight significant aspects of "lived synodality." In responding to these questions, it is helpful to remember that "journeying together" occurs in two deeply interconnected ways. First, we journey together with one another as the People of God. Next, we journey together as the People of God with the entire human family. These two perspectives enrich one another and are helpful for our common discernment towards deeper communion and more fruitful mission. The questions accompanying each of the following ten themes can be used as a starting point or as helpful guidelines. Your conversation and dialogue do not need to be limited to the following questions. The aim is not to cover all the questions but rather to discern and focus on those aspects of synodality most pertinent in your context. You are encouraged to share with honesty and openness about your real-life experiences, and to reflect together on what the Holy Spirit might be revealing through what you share with one another.

COMPANIONS ON THE JOURNEY

Our Synod journey takes place in the midst of where the Church ordinarily lives and work in the day to day lives of the faithful. The Synodal process invites each one of us—the People of God—to recall that we journey together. Moreover, in that journey of faith we are called to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit.

- In the Church and in society we are side by side on the same road.
 - In our diocese and parish, who are those who "walk together"?
 - Who are those who seem further apart?
 - How are we called to grow as companions?
 - What groups or individuals are left on the margins?

LISTENING

The meaning of the journey to which we are all called is above all that of discovering the face and form of a Synodal Church, 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.

- Listening is the first step, but it requires an open mind and heart, without prejudice.
 - How is God speaking to us through voices we sometimes ignore?
 - How are the laity listened to, especially women and young people?
 - What facilitates or inhibits our listening?
 - How well do we listen to those on the peripheries?
 - How is the contribution of consecrated men and women integrated?
 - What are some limitations in our ability to listen, especially to those who have different views than our own?
 - What space is there for the voice of minorities, especially people who experience poverty, marginalization, or social exclusion?

SPEAKING OUT

The Pastors, established by God as authentic guardians, interpreters and witnesses of the faith of the whole Church should not be afraid to listen to the flock entrusted to them. The consultation of the People of God does not imply the assumption within the Church of the dynamics of democracy based on the principle of majority because there is, at the basis of participation in every Synodal process, a shared passion for the common mission of evangelization and not the representation of conflicting interests.

- All are invited to speak with courage and honesty, that is, in freedom, truth, and charity.
 - What enables or hinders speaking up courageously, candidly, and responsibly in our diocese, our parish, and in society?
 - When and how do we manage to say what is important to us?
 - How does the relationship with the local media work (not only Catholic media)?
 - Who speaks on behalf of the Christian community, and how are they chosen?

CELEBRATION

They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles (Acts 2:42–43).

- “Walking together” is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word and the celebration of the Eucharist.
 - How do prayer and liturgical celebrations actually inspire and guide our common life and mission in our community?
 - How do they inspire the most important decisions?
 - How do we promote the active participation of all the faithful in the liturgy?
 - What space is given to participating in the ministries of lector and acolyte?

SHARING RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR COMMON MISSION

Synodality is at the service of the mission of the Church, in which all members are called to participate. A Synodal church is a participatory and co-responsible Church. The members of the People of God are united by Baptism, and if by the will of Christ some are made teachers, pastors, and dispensers of mysteries on behalf of others, yet all share a true equality with regard to dignity and to the activity common to all the Faithful for the building up of the Body of Christ.

- Synodality is at the service of the mission of the Church, in which all members are called to participate. Since we are all missionary disciples:
 - How is every baptized person called to participate in the mission of the Church?
 - What hinders the baptized from being active in mission?

- What areas of mission are we neglecting?
- How does the community support its members who serve society in various ways (social and political involvement, scientific research, education, promoting social justice, protecting human rights, caring for the environment, etc.)?
- How does the Church help these members to live out their service to society in a missionary way?
- How is discernment about missionary choices made and by whom?

DIALOGUE IN CHURCH AND SOCIETY

In a Synodal style, we make decisions through discernment of what the Holy Spirit is saying through our whole community. The Synodal style of decision-making is to listen first, dialogue, pray, discern, and then the pastor makes a decision on behalf of community. A Synodal Church does not make decisions to accomplish pre-identified priorities. In a Synodal Church, the whole community, in the free and rich diversity of its members, is called together to pray, listen, analyze, dialogue, discern and offer advice on making pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God's will.

- Dialogue requires perseverance and patience, but it also enables mutual understanding.
 - To what extent do diverse peoples in our community come together for dialogue?
 - What are the places and means of dialogue within our diocese and parish?
 - How do we promote collaboration with neighboring parishes, dioceses, religious communities in the area, lay associations and movements, etc.?
 - How are divergences of vision, or conflicts and difficulties, addressed?
 - What particular issues in the Church and society do we need to pay more attention to?
 - What experiences of dialogue and collaboration do we have with believers of other religions and with those who have no religious affiliation?
 - How does the Church dialogue with and learn from other sectors of society?
 - Especially in the spheres of politics, economics, culture, civil society, and people who live in poverty.

ECUMENISM

I pray not only for them, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, so that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you...(John 17:20–21). The attainment of union is the concern of the whole Church, faithful and shepherds alike. This concern extends to everyone, according to his talent, whether it be exercised in his daily Christian life or in his theological and historical research. This concern itself reveals already to some extent the bond of brotherhood between all Christians and it helps toward that full and perfect unity which God in His kindness wills.

- The dialogue between Christians of different confessions, united by one baptism, has a special place in the synodal journey.
 - What relationships does our Church community have with members of other Christian traditions and denominations?
 - What do we share and how do we journey together?
 - What fruits have we drawn from walking together?
 - What are the difficulties?
 - How can we take the next step in walking forward with each other?

AUTHORITY AND PARTICIPATION

Conscious of their own responsibility, the Christian faithful are bound to follow with Christian obedience those things which the sacred pastors, inasmuch as they represent Christ, declare as teachers of the faith or establish as rulers of the Church. The Christian faithful are free to make known to the pastors of the Church their needs, especially spiritual ones, and their desires. According to the knowledge, competence, and prestige which they possess, they have the right and even at times the duty to manifest to the sacred pastors their opinion on matters which pertain to the good of the Church and to make their opinion known to the rest of the Christian faithful, without prejudice to the

integrity of faith and morals, with reverence toward their pastors, and attentive to common advantage and the dignity of persons.

- A synodal church is a participatory and co-responsible Church.
 - How does our Church community identify the goals to be pursued, the way to reach them, and the steps to be taken?
 - How is authority or governance exercised within our diocese?
 - How are teamwork and co-responsibility put into practice?
 - How are evaluations conducted and by whom?
 - How are lay ministries and the responsibility of lay people promoted?
 - Have we had fruitful experiences of synodality on a local level?
 - How do synodal bodies function at the level of the parish and diocese (pastoral councils in parishes, deaneries, and the diocese, the presbyteral council, college of deans, etc.)?
 - How can we foster a more synodal approach in our participation and leadership?

DISCERNING AND DECIDING

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Romans 15:13). The Holy Spirit sent by Christ and received in our Baptism and Confirmation guides our efforts, breathes life and vitality into the Church, and leads us into a deeper relationship with Jesus and deeper communion with the Church in order to proclaim the Gospel. This Synodal journey is guided by the Holy Spirit.

- In a synodal style we make decisions through discernment of what the Holy Spirit is saying through our whole community.
 - What methods and processes do we use in decision-making?
 - How can they be improved?
 - How do we promote participation in decision-making within hierarchical structures?
 - Do our decision-making methods help us to listen to the whole People of God?
 - What is the relationship between consultation and decision-making, and how do we put these into practice?
 - What tools and procedures do we use to promote transparency and accountability? How can we grow in communal spiritual discernment?

FORMING OURSELVES IN SYNODALITY

Celebrating a Synod means walking on the same road, walking together. Let us begin by asking ourselves whether we, the Christian community, embody this “style” of God, who travels the paths of history and shares in the life of humanity. Participating in a Synod means placing ourselves on the same path as the Word made flesh. 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 (Pope Francis, Homily of October 10, 2021).

- Synodality entails receptivity to change, formation, and on-going learning.
 - How does our church community form people to be more capable of “walking together,” listening to one another, participating in mission, and engaging in dialogue?
 - What formation is offered to foster discernment and the exercise of authority in a synodal way?

A true synodal journey cannot disregard our willingness to be converted by our listening to the Word of God and by the Holy Spirit present in our lives. Baptism, the fundamental vocation for all of the Lord’s disciples, is the first conversion worked by the Holy Spirit within our hearts; at the same time, the entirety of Christian life must remain open to a journey of conversion to God and His Word. Even from a purely human point of view, we know that true listening also requires reciprocal conversion that invites us to leave our securities behind so that we might enter the difficult but indispensable terrain of dialogue. If the synodal path is not, above all, an ecclesial journey of love to the Father through Christ in the Spirit, it will surely not bear the hoped for fruit.

—Cardinal Mario Grech, General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops

HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS OF OCTOBER 21, 2021

Scripture Readings: Wisdom 7:7–11; Psalm 90; Hebrews 4:12–13; Mark 10:17–30

A certain rich man came up to Jesus “as he was setting out on his journey” (Mk. 10:17). The Gospels frequently show us Jesus “on a journey”; he walks alongside people and listens to the questions and concerns lurking in their hearts. He shows us that God is not found in neat and orderly places, distant from reality, but walks ever at our side. He meets us where we are, on the often rocky roads of life. 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.

The first is *encounter*. The Gospel passage begins by speaking of an encounter. A man comes up to Jesus and kneels down before him, asking him a crucial question: “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” (v. 17). So important a question requires attention, time, willingness to encounter others and sensitivity to what troubles them. The Lord is not stand aloof; he does not appear annoyed or disturbed. Instead, he is completely present to this person. He is open to encounter. Nothing leaves Jesus indifferent; everything is of concern to him. Encountering faces, meeting eyes, sharing each individual’s history. That is the closeness that Jesus embodies. He knows that someone’s life can be changed by a single encounter. The Gospel is full of such encounters with Christ, encounters that uplift and bring healing. Jesus did not hurry along, or keep looking at his watch to get the meeting over. He was always at the service of the person he was with, listening to what he or she had to say.

As we initiate this process, we too are called to become experts in the *art of encounter*. Not so much by organizing events or theorizing about problems, as in taking time to encounter the Lord and one another. Time to devote to prayer and to adoration—that form of prayer that we so often neglect—devoting time to adoration, and to hearing what the Spirit wants to say to the Church. 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. If at times we would rather take refuge in formality or presenting the proper image—the clerical and courtly spirit, where I am more *Monsieur l’abbé* than *Father*—the experience of encounter changes us; frequently it opens up new and unexpected possibilities. Following today’s Angelus, I will meet with a group of street people who came together simply because a group of people made an effort to listen to them, sometimes just to listen to them. And from that listening they succeeded in setting out on a new path. So often God points out new paths in just this way. He invites us to leave our old habits behind. Everything changes once we are capable of genuine encounters with him and with one another, without formalism or pretense, but simply as we are.

The second verb is *listen*. True encounter arises only from listening. Jesus listened to that man’s question and to the religious and existential concerns that lay behind it. He did not give a non-committal reply or offer a prepackaged solution; he did not pretend to respond politely, simply as a way of dismissing him and continuing on his way. Jesus simply listens, for whatever amount of time it takes; he is not rushed. Most importantly, he is not afraid to *listen to him with his heart* and not just with his ears. Indeed, he does more than simply answer the rich man’s question; he lets him tell his story, to speak freely about himself. Christ reminds him of the commandments, and the man starts to talk about his youth, to share his

religious journey and his efforts to seek God. This happens whenever we listen with the heart: people feel that they are being heard, not judged; they feel free to recount their own experiences and their spiritual journey.

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, selling whatever takes up space in his heart, in order to make room for God.

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” (Heb. 4:12). 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.

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Although synodality is not explicitly found as a term or as a concept in the teaching of Vatican II, it is fair to say that synodality is at the heart of the work of renewal the Council was encouraging. The ecclesiology of the People of God stresses the common dignity and mission of all the baptized, in exercising the variety and ordered richness of their charisms, their vocations and their ministries. In this context the concept of communion expresses the profound substance of the mystery and mission of the Church, whose source and summit is the Eucharistic synaxis. [...] Synodality is the specific [way of living and working] of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and gives substance to her being as communion when all her members journey together, gather in assembly and take an active part in her evangelizing mission.

—International Theological Commission, *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church*, March 2, 2018.

ADSUMUS, SANCTE SPIRITUS

Every session of the Second Vatican Council began with the prayer *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*, the first words of the Latin prayer, meaning “*We stand before You, Holy Spirit*,” which has been historically used at Councils, Synods, and other Church gatherings for hundreds of years, being attributed to Saint Isidore of Seville (c. 560–April 4, 636). As we are called to embrace this synodal path of the Synod 2021–2023, this prayer invites the Holy Spirit to operate within us so that we may be a community and a people of grace.

■ For the Synod 2021–2023, the Synod of Bishops proposes to use a simplified version of the *Adsumus*, so that any group can pray more easily. The simplified version is below:

We stand before You, Holy Spirit,
as we gather together in Your name.
With You alone to guide us,
make Yourself at home in our hearts;
Teach us the way we must go
and how we are to pursue it.
We are weak and sinful;
do not let us promote disorder.
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong
path nor partiality influence our actions.
Let us find in You our unity
so that we may journey together to eternal life
and not stray from the way of truth
and what is right.
All this we ask of You,
who are at work in every place and time,
in the communion of the Father and the Son,
forever and ever. Amen.

■ The traditional, complete, version of the *Adsumus* is reproduced below for those who prefer to use this version:

We stand before you, Holy Spirit,
conscious of our sinfulness,
but aware that we gather in your name.
Come to us, remain with us,
and enlighten our hearts.
Give us light and strength
to know your will,
to make it our own,
and to live it in our lives.
Guide us by your wisdom,
support us by your power,
for you are God,
sharing the glory of Father and Son.
You desire justice for all:
enable us to uphold the rights of others;
do not allow us to be misled by ignorance
or corrupted by fear or favor.
Unite us to yourself in the bond of love
and keep us faithful to all that is true.
As we gather in your name
may we temper justice with love,
so that all our decisions
may be pleasing to you,
and earn the reward
promised to good and faithful servants. Amen.