

Local Diocesan Launch of Universal Synodal Pathway, October 17th, 2021

28th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year. B.

Homily Notes of Bishop Brendan Leahy

It is surprising that after all Jesus had said and shown them, the apostles John and James come along and are jockeying for positions of glory in his community. It's as if they have missed the whole point – the logic of the community that Jesus has established is the logic of service: put yourself in the last place, be ready to lay down your life for others.

Mind you, that's never an easy message to hear. There's a certain amount of ambition in everyone. Some of it can be to do good, but much of it can be self-centred. That's why Jesus really wants us to hear his message – it is those who serve out of love who are the real rulers in the Church.

In many ways, through the events and circumstances of recent times, it's as if the Holy Spirit is underlining this message for us particularly in our times. What matters is not “who” we are in the Church in terms of position or ministry or titles, but rather “how” we are living out our Baptismal vocation to be another Jesus, loving our neighbour as ourselves, journeying with them in humility and service, with all of us working together to unleash the fragrance of Christ in our world.

Pope Francis has recently launched a worldwide Synod that he hopes will involve everyone in the Church. The final part of this Synod will be held in Rome in 2023 but the Synod has already started in that, for the first time in the Church's two-thousand-year history, it will involve the *whole* People of God. This worldwide Synod has been called the greatest event in the Church since the Second Vatican Council. And today, throughout the world, each Diocese is officially celebrating the start of this process that will reach out to everyone.

In Limerick we already had our own Synod in 2016 that involved over 5000 people. The word “synod”, let's remember, means “journeying together”. It refers to how we work out together, helped by the Holy Spirit, what is it God wants of us as the People of God. The Synod in Limerick was a wonderful event but now the Pope is inviting to take another step and be part of this worldwide Synod focussing on a basic question: how does ‘journeying together’ take place today on the different levels of our Church community – from the parish to the Diocese to the worldwide Church? In other words, the worldwide Synod is about Synodality! We are being asked to consider: how are we getting on together in the Church, in our own parish, in relating to other parishes and across the Diocese and beyond? how are we communicating with each other (after all, we're all different!), how are we making sure as many as possible feel they are participating in the life of the Church? how are we in contact with those who no longer come to Church? Is the Gospel message getting through from the way we do things? What steps is the Spirit inviting us to take in order to grow as a Synodal Church?

In the coming weeks and months, each parish will offer possibilities for consultation. Representatives of the Diocese will make contact with groups and associations throughout the Diocese. In time, we'll have opportunities for submissions on our Diocesan website. I myself will engage in focus groups trying to reach out to groups we missed out on during our own Limerick Synod.

The process that is beginning today depends very much on the Holy Spirit. It's not meant just to be a talk shop. As Pope Francis keeps repeating, a Synod is not a parliament. It's not a survey of opinions. It's not a political convention. It's very much a spiritual time of sharing, deep listening and faith conversations. It is a time of healing as we share our story, learn from one another and grow together spiritually. It's a time to let Jesus be more present among us to offer us his wisdom and point us in new directions.

And that brings us back to today's Gospel. As we set out on this worldwide Synod, we need to keep our eyes fixed in adoration of the face of Jesus who teaches us how to serve. Along with that, we need to be open to the Holy Spirit, grateful that we have received so much from the God who has loved us first, serving us in his Son, Jesus. As we go forward listening to others and sharing his love with them, we are not just making taking part in a consultative structure or process, we are growing in loving service of one another and that is at the heart of the Synodal pathway. Indeed, it is the heart of what the Church is meant to be as today's Gospel reminds us.

One final point. Last March it was announced that we in Ireland are going to hold a national Synod or Synods in five years' time. We need to prepare for that. In a way, we can say we now are starting out on two Synodal pathways. The worldwide process that Pope Francis has launched with the basic question about how it is we participate in the life of the Church, is helping us in Ireland to take our first steps along our own national journey. We'll be hearing more about our own national journey in the Spring time. For now, however, let's join with the voices of our sisters and brothers all over the world who today are invoking the Holy Spirit as they begin this worldwide initiative, praying a famous prayer that for over a thousand years has been prayed at the beginning of a Synod:

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.