

SYNOD

What is a synod (Pronounced as Sin-od)? Simply put, *a synod is an assembly of the clergy and sometimes also the laity in a diocese or other division of a particular Church.* Pope Francis has called for a ‘synod’ that includes the WHOLE CHURCH. The following is homily given by Nelson Perez, the Archbishop of Philadelphia. For me, it makes the most sense and simplifies what is being asked of us during grace time. He writes:

“Our pope has called for a world wide ‘synod’ is Journeying together. The four gospels are filled with stories that happened on the journey... for 3 year Jesus journeyed from Galilee to Jerusalem. The purpose: to form, to teach, to listen, to engage and to collaborate. In a way that was a synod... what the world needed and they wanted to be part of it. As they journeyed, the followers really didn’t get it. As Jesus was speaking about one thing... they were speaking about another thing. But Jesus was patient and he knew that it was a journey... he was patient with these characters. If we met them in person we wouldn’t have chosen them. But they were chosen to be part of the journey and encounter.

The call of synod is to focus on our journey and our encounter with Jesus. And yet we are used to programs and steps to follow... like a syllabus at school. Other synods have focused on other aspects of the church... the family, Evangelization and so on. This one is ambiguous. For Francis, the process is very important more so than the end results... like Jesus... end results not great but the process or journey was key. Because lots of things happened on the journey. Like the church, great things happen but also profound scandal and sin. And yet, that is human condition... broken sinful people. The only perfect person was Jesus.

Francis says about synod: What he wants from the universal church and our diocese. **“Celebrating a synod is walking on the same road and walking together.** Let us look at Jesus first he encounters than he listens, and finally he helps to discern.” **Synod is a process of dialogue: to encounter, listen and discern.**

1. **Encounter:** that is how Gospel begins: God encounters us, Jesus is present to us... God is open to all of us because the Lord has a greater heart than us. Jesus shares in us, embodies us. So the process of the universal church we are called to be experts in the time of encounter through prayer, adoration, listening to what the spirit is saying to us and to others.

2. **Listen:** to guide the synod. True encounter only happens with real listening. Jesus simply listened. He was never rushed. And he was not afraid to listen with his heart and not just with his ears.

3. **Discern:** we are great at encounter listening and then we don't do anything with it (like our pastoral plan of 2012 DJM). When we enter into dialogue we allow ourselves to be challenged on the journey. Only Doing good transformed the world... following rules keeps order but doesn't change hearts. We carry too much stuff in our hearts. Through dialogue we learn to discern, by encounter, listening, and we are changed... we are not the same.

Therefore the synod is a process of a spiritual discernment that unfolds in prayer and with dialogue with the Word of God. Francis concludes his own reflection with,

Dear Sisters and Brothers, 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 graced filled opportunity born of encounter of encounter, listening and discernment... because Jesus is always there to meet us with his love to meet us first.

So we need to walk together and talk about what is in our heart for our church now and for the future. It will be short, and we invited to do our part. In fall of 2023 they will examine and discern our responses. And never should we forget the power of the Holy Spirit, our names sake. This will force us to talk to each other and to listen to what the Spirit will call us too. Finished in April, then we will join the rest of North America and to present our findings. We are all invited on the journey, journey of the Spirit because the Holy Spirit still has so much teach us.

+ Nelson Perez
Archbishop of Philadelphia