



THE DIOCESE OF HOUMA THIBODAUX

Bishop Fabre's Message on the Synod of Bishops

On Sunday, October 10, Pope Francis celebrated Mass in Rome to begin the preparation process for the upcoming Synod of Bishops. Every three to four years, bishops from around the world gather in Rome to discuss and discern a particular topic chosen by the Pope for the enrichment of the Church. These synods have covered topics including the Eucharist, the vocation of the laity, the new evangelization, the family, and young people, just to name a few.

This year, Pope Francis has decided to do something new with the synod. The topic this year is to reflect upon the Church's role in listening and journeying with others – a concept that he calls “synodality.” The word “synod” literally means “gathering” or “assembly.” The desire of Pope Francis is to provide an opportunity for the worldwide Church to reflect on how she fosters this gathering of people from all backgrounds, listens to them, and accompanies them in their walks of life. He says that “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.”

To this end, the Holy Father desires us to be intentional about actually listening to the experiences of people from all walks of life to hear how they have, or have not, been accompanied by the Church. Rather than following the normal procedures of simply gathering the bishops in Rome, he has instituted a two-year listening process that involves every diocese in the world, where they will hear people's thoughts and desires regarding how the Church can better accompany every person. Pope Francis is emphatic that we must hear from *all*, those who participate in the life of the Church, those who have left the Church, people of all ages and ethnicities, paying particular attention to those who are often left out or excluded. As dioceses hear people's experiences, they will compile this information to be used to inform the actual Synod of Bishops, which will take place in 2023.

Never before has such a worldwide effort of listening been undertaken in the Church in this way. Pope Francis has a deep desire for the Church to better imitate the way that Jesus encountered others: he showed no prejudice to who they were or what their status was, he was willing to truly listen to them and be affected by them, and he walked with them in a way that fostered divine love in their heart. We as a Church are often fearful of the unknown, the Holy Father says in his opening homily, preferring to take refuge in the usual excuses of “It's useless” or “We've always done it this way.” It's easy to remain in the status quo, to remain in what is known and comfortable rather than taking a step into the unknown. Pope Francis invites us to shake things up by both intentionally journeying with those we often leave out and to discern how God is calling us to respond to that.

It's easy to write off such efforts as ineffective and all “for show,” to go through the motions without actually taking concrete steps to change based on what we've heard and seen. We as a Church and as a People of God, clerics and laity alike, have a responsibility to discern how God is journeying with

us and where he is leading us on that journey. We all have to be willing to take the step of faith into new waters, confident that if the Lord is leading us there, it will bring forth much fruit.

In the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, we will also be participating in this process of listening to hear how we as a particular diocese can better journey with our people here. The impacts of Hurricane Ida have certainly proven to be a significant challenge for all – these months have looked nothing like we thought they would. However, I am confident that God has a plan and continues to remain with us as we walk on this journey one step at a time. You can contact your pastor for more information on how you can share your thoughts. In the meantime, I invite you to please pray for the efforts of the Church to better accompany every person whose heart yearns to know and experience the presence of Jesus with them. I conclude with the prayer that Pope Francis has asked us to pray, asking the Holy Spirit to bless our efforts:

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.