

Monastic Scribe XIV: October 29, 2021

JOIN US AT THE SYNOD

Pope John XXIII was my hero. At age 78 he called the Second Vatican Council. Under the guise of a jolly old grandfather figure, I learned he was a very shrewd, holy and learned man. He surely stirred things up in the Church and we are still trying to assimilate it all. Now we have an 84 year old Pope and he is attempting to do something similar. The Global Synod he has called is the biggest thing to happen in the Church since the Vatican Council.

When Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio was elected Pope in 2013, the Cardinal electors deliberately wanted him to bring about reforms in the Church, especially with the Roman Curia. He has slowly and painstakingly been doing just that. He has not changed many structures in the Church which many would like him to do. But he has been working on something deeper, the attitudes we have as a Church. For instance, he sees clericalism as a big obstacle to a Christ-like approach to authority. This has to change both in clergy and lay people for other changes to take effect.

On October 10th he formally opened a Synod on Synodality with Mass in St. Peter's Basilica. Many lay people, as well as bishops and cardinals, were present. The day before was spent in prayer and trying out the Synod approach. This consisted of meetings with all people being equal. The heart of it was to listen to each other. Periods of silence and short sharings followed by more silence and discussion were practiced. This is to be the pattern for groups all over the world as church groups gather. The themes to be stressed are communion, participation and mission.

Two years are to be spent in preparation before the formal Synod meets in Rome in October 2023. This first year is to take place on the diocesan and parish levels. Since as many people as possible are to take part, this needs some organization and structure. The Synod in each diocese was to open on October 17th with groups to meet through next April. There are some dioceses, in fact, which did begin on October 17th with Masses imploring the holy Spirit throughout the diocese and sermons on the nature of the Synod. Around us Fall River and Burlington, Vermont have joined in with fervor. Unfortunately, little has been done in Boston as well as many other American dioceses. A short four question survey about listening has been sent out. There are two priests (Bishop Reed and Fr. Soper) and no lay people or women heading the preparation for the Synod

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which will not open in Boston until November 27th. With the holiday shopping season to follow and then winter, I wonder how much can be achieved.

Pope Francis wants everyone to be involved – young and old, lay and clerical, man and woman. All need to really listen to each other. Statements gathered at the end of the session are not to be based on a majority vote. Discernment, rather, must be part of the process which means all is done in the context of prayer and, again, of listening. Openness to listen means the willingness to possibly change one's mind about some issue if that emerges from discernment to be the best thing for the church and the common good.

The Pope is pushing this project for the reform of the church, to bring the church together to be a real sign of the kingdom of God in this world. It sounds like it is an impossible goal, especially with the resistance being encountered in the United States (and this often accompanies resistance to Pope Francis and the Second Vatican Council). It may be the last hope to bring new life to the church.

When the Second Vatican Council opened in 1962, members of the Curia prepared texts with the intent of having the Bishops ratify all they prepared. But something stirred in the assembly and the texts were one by one rejected and then new teachings were enunciated with the direction of bishops and theologians and the encouraging blessing of Popes John XXIII and Paul VI. Pope John dismissed the negativity and cynicism of the “prophets of doom” and called for the windows of the church to be opened to the movement of the Holy Spirit. Surely that is what is needed again in 2021 – 2023.

Speak up, fellow Christian, and let your voice be heard. The living experiences of lay people, in particular, need to be heard. If you contact me at joycet@glastonburyabbey.org I will send you a list of some addresses for you to contact. And please pray, Come Holy Spirit...

Fr. Timothy Joyce, OSB, STL

Please note that I do not speak on behalf of Glastonbury Abbey, the Archdiocese of Boston or the Catholic Church, though I hope my faith is in harmony with all these. Any error in judgment should be credited to me and not anyone else.