

## **Monastic Scribe XXXVIII: October 28, 2022**

### **A SNYOD? WHAT'S THAT?**

By now most people have at least heard about the Synod if they don't really know what it is all about. Do you know anything of what has been happening? What do you think of it? Pope Francis has been pushing it as the way to get the teachings of the Second Vatican Council into the mainstream of the Church. Some people, especially in the southern hemisphere, have been excited about it and have participated in preparations. Here, in the United States interest has varied. In some areas interest has been lukewarm at best. There are some, even Bishops, who feel it all a waste of time.

There are three phases to the Synod. The first phase ended this August. This phase consisted of local meetings of people, both lay and clerical together. These meetings were often organized by a diocese but there were also spontaneous gatherings of lay or religious people who were determined to have their voices heard. The pattern for a meeting was to have a person share beliefs about the church and everyone else to listen. Silence to absorb feelings and prayer to break through obstacles to listening or understanding were also suggested. I did not hear about many such meetings in the Boston Archdiocese but I guess there were some.

In fact, 112 out of 114 dioceses sent in their reports on their meetings. A committee of Bishops, priests, theologians and lay people put together a nineteen page report on all these meetings. It turns out that 770,000 people were heard. This isn't a large number of American Catholics but, significantly, there was a large consistency across the country of opinions offered.

Their report begins with a summary of three great wounds in the Church. The first is the sexual abuse crisis which continues to infest the Body of Christ. The second is dissatisfaction with Bishops of the country for their poor leadership and even some opposition to the Pope. This is rather blunt language for a report that is put out in the Bishops' name. The third wound is the marginalization of some groups, notably youth and women. Later parts of the report spell out these wounds as well as other problems, suggestions and hopes for the Church.

After these reports were made by various countries they were sent to Rome. In September thirty-five bishops, theologians and lay people met in a retreat house in Frascati, outside of Rome, to synthesize all the reports. These reports not only were the official diocesan reports but individual reports sent in to the Office of the Synod. The latter included a report prepared by some of the lay people who worship at Glastonbury with comments from others as well. Cardinal Mario Grech

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of Malta, chair of the Synod office, assures us that every report was taken seriously.

The second phase begins soon. A meeting of Continental bodies will study the synthesized reports and prepare a new report. Again this will be bishops and lay participants. In our case the American and Canadian churches together.

The third phase will be a meeting in Rome October 4 – 29, 2023. What will be decided at that meeting is known only to God. But Pope Francis has recently announced that this will be only part one of the actual Synod. Part Two will take place in the Fall of 2024. More time is needed for discernment to decide on any policies or practices that will be changed. Who will take part in these final deliberations has not been announced. But the Pope, along with Cardinal Grech, Sister Nathalie and others in the Synod office hope for a substantial renewal of the Church.

I can hear many readers saying or feeling this will be only more talk and little action. Americans are practical and often impatient people who demand results. What can we expect? Will the church ordain women, at least to the diaconate? I just don't know. But this I do see already happening. The process is changing participants. It is a rolling back of clericalism. Many who did not expect much have been surprised by the openness, honesty, acceptance of all opinions. In the mind of Francis, this is an essential first. The church must change attitudes before it changes practices and policies. There needs to be a different mindset in the church.

In 1962 over 2000 Bishops met for the Second Vatican Council. Many of them were skeptical or even resentful of the time away from their dioceses. But many were changed. There was great hope. Seeds were sown but were not given time and space to grow. This Pope is resurrecting that hope. And so I also do hope too. And I rely on the Holy Spirit to breathe new life in the Body of Christ. We all need to have hope and avoid cynicism, despair and apathy. What can you do? Let me know at: [joycet@glastonburyabbey.org](mailto:joycet@glastonburyabbey.org)

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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.