



Homily to Launch the Synod in the Diocese of London

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St. Peter's Cathedral Basilica, London

Dear brothers and sisters, last Sunday, in Rome, Pope Francis celebrated the opening ceremonies for the Synod of Bishops. The theme of this synod is "Being a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission." Our Church has had many synods and they're an important moment in the life of the Church. Today, following what Pope Francis did last Sunday, I'm launching the synod in the Diocese of London. At this Mass then, we are united with dioceses around the world that are likewise launching the synod. The pope has invited all of us, all the baptized, to participate in the synodal process that will occur over the next two years. He invites us to engage in dialogue, to pray and listen to and learn from one another. To journey with one another. As we seek to carry on the Church's mission of proclaiming the gospel in today's world.

What is special is that the pope wants this synod to engage our lay-people. The message is 'the Church cares about what you think.' The synod is a means to facilitate dialogue and interaction among the people of God. Especially, the pope says, between laity, clergy and those living the consecrated life. We need to be praying together and having meaningful dialogue about what is important to us as Catholics and the future direction of our Church. Pope Francis' hope is that the synod will bring about a whole new way of 'being Church.' The Church, he says, does not stand aloof from life, but immerses herself in the real lives of people and in the issues of the day, "bandaging the wounded and healing those with broken hearts. We need to turn to the Holy Spirit who frees us from every form of self-absorption, revives what is dead, loosens shackles and spread the joy of the gospel."

The Pope's words are very inspiring about what we're entering into now in the Synod. I've said that my vision for our diocese is to be a missionary church that forms disciples of Jesus. Entering this synodal process will help us here in our diocese to understand this vision in new ways. In our parishes we're working hard to become genuine disciples of Jesus and inviting others to experience the joy of encountering Jesus in their lives. This synod invites us to come together in our parishes and to reach out to Catholics not coming to church regularly. To reach out to our young people to listen prayerfully to God's word. To listen to God speaking through one another. The synod is not an opinion poll, but opening our minds and hearts to the Holy Spirit, who enables our church to break out of routine, to discern the times in which we live, in solidarity with the struggles and aspiration of all of our brothers and sisters.

In this gospel reading that we've just listened to [Mark 10:35-45], it encourages us as we enter this synodal process. James and John asked Jesus to sit at his Kingdom, one at his right hand and one at his left hand. The other disciples are angry. It's easy to judge the disciples harshly for their self-serving ambition. Yet Jesus did not do so. He did not rebuke them. Ambition can corrupt a person, but Jesus' purpose, as we see in this reading, was to teach his disciples a different way, to free them from their narrow self-interested and to open them to his generous self-offering. To open them to the example

that he gives them. Jesus accepted the disciples as they were, with all their weaknesses and limitations and he led them to a path that he would walk, the path of the cross and death that opens the way to resurrection and new life.

In this synodal process we will sit down to pray and listen to one another. Like Jesus, we are not to judge one another, we're to accept others as they are, listen to one another, to the Holy Spirit speaking through each of us. As together we seek to discern the path that God has for our church. In the weeks ahead, our Diocese will be providing our parishes with all sorts of information about the synod and how and when you, our parishioners, can get involved. We will be reaching out to Catholics who come to our churches regularly and to those who are not coming. We will come together and will tell our stories, our faith stories, to each other and to speak of our hopes for our Church, our dreams and our disappointments. I encourage all of us to be engaged in the synodal process, to take part in it, and to join in prayer. May the Holy Spirit unite us, guide us, and teach our Church the way we must go.