



A listening Church – A Synodal Church

“Let anyone who has an ear listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”

(Rev 2:29)

The world in which we live,

and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission. It is precisely this path of *synodality* which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.

(Pope Francis, Address Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, 2015)

A synodal Church is a Church which listens,

which realizes that listening “is more than simply hearing”.

It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn...

all listening to the Holy Spirit, the “Spirit of truth” (Jn 14:17),

in order to know what he “says to the Churches” (Rev 2:7)...

(Pope Francis, Address Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, 2015)

Pope Francis’ calls for “a listening church, a synodal church,”

at all levels of church life.

The Holy Spirit, he says,

must be given breathing room to bring forth such a church.

The Spirit’s instrument for interpreting divine revelation is the *sensus fidei*,

a “sense of the faith”, or better, a sense for the faith.

It is capacity which the Spirit gives, along with the gift of faith,

to a every baptized believer and to the church as a whole.

A synodal church is a church that listens to the Spirit

communicating through the sense of all the faithful, the *sensus fidelium*.

(Ormond Rush, ‘Plenary Council Participation and Reception:

Synodality and Discerning the Sensus Fidelium, plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au ‘Resources’)

Synodality is a constitutive element of the Church.

In this Church, *as in an inverted pyramid*,

the top is located beneath the base.

(Pope Francis, Address Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, 2015)

We need to practice the art of listening,

which is more than simply hearing.

(Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 171)

Listening, in communication, is an openness of heart

which makes possible that closeness

without which genuine spiritual encounter cannot occur.

Listening helps us to find the right gesture and word

which shows that we are more than simply bystanders.

(Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 171)

I want to throw open the windows of the Church

so that we can see out and the people can see in.

(Pope John XXIII, quoted at the time of his Vatican II Council announcement, 1959)

Now is the time for each local Church to assess its fervour and find fresh enthusiasm for its spiritual and pastoral responsibilities, by reflecting on what the Spirit has been saying to the People of God ...

(Pope John Paul II, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 2001, 3)

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Listening to All the Voices

Together we are on a journey

of listening to God by listening to one another.

We invite all Australians to engage in an open and inclusive process of listening, dialogue and discernment about the future of the Catholic Church in Australia.

Your voice is needed – join in.

(Plenary Council 2020 website: www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au)

The voices of lay people are heard much more frequently now in the Church

...They organise themselves within parishes and in various groups and movements to build up the Church and to influence society at large,

and they seek contact via social media with other believers and with people of good will.

(*Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church, International Theological Commission 2014, 116*)

I have looked into your eyes with my eyes.

I have put my heart near your heart.

(Pope John XXIII to a prisoner in Rome, Dec. 25, 1958)

“We need to look at our cities”

— and thus all areas where the life of our people unfolds —

“with a contemplative gaze, a gaze of faith

which sees God dwelling in their homes, in their streets and squares...

He dwells among them, fostering solidarity, fraternity,

and the desire for goodness, truth and justice.

This presence must not be contrived but found, uncovered.

God does not hide himself from those who seek him with a sincere heart”

(Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 71).

Reading The Signs of the Times

Whenever we attempt to read the signs of the times

it is helpful to listen to young people and the elderly.

Both represent a source of hope for every people.

The elderly bring with them memory and the wisdom of experience,

which warns us not to foolishly repeat our past mistakes.

Young people call us to renewed and expansive hope,

for they represent new directions for humanity and open us up to the future,

lest we cling to a nostalgia for structures and customs

which are no longer life-giving in today's world. (Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 108)

...the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times

and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel.

(Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 1965, 4)

The People of God believes that it is led by the Lord's Spirit, Who fills the earth.

Motivated by this faith, it labours to decipher authentic signs of God's presence and purpose

in the happenings, needs and desires in which this People has a part along with other men of our age.

For faith throws a new light on everything, manifests God's design for man's total vocation,

and thus directs the mind to solutions which are fully human.

(Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 11)

...the Church

should never depart from the sacred treasure of truth inherited from the Fathers.

But at the same time she must ever look to the present, to the new conditions

and the new forms of life introduced into the modern world.

(Pope John XXIII, Opening Speech to the Second Vatican Council in St Peter's, Vatican, 11 October 1962)

The circumstances of the Church in Australia in our time,
including the patterns of change that are evident within the community of the Church,
the issues confronting the Church in modern multicultural and secular Australia,
the increase in entrusting responsibility for and leadership of the Church's mission to laity,
and even the changing face of the Episcopate, prompt the Church to review, analyse,
and discern the signs of the times, to listen anew to the Spirit, and to chart its course into the future.'
(Archbishop Mark Coleridge)

A Sense of Faith

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever.
This is the Spirit of truth...You know him because he abides with you, and he will be in you." (John 14:17)

The holy people of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office... (Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 12)

The *sensus fidei fidelis* is a sort of spiritual instinct
that enables the believer to judge spontaneously
whether a particular teaching or practice
is or is not in conformity with the Gospel and with apostolic faith
...intrinsically linked to the virtue of faith itself.
(*Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*, International Theological Commission 2014, 49)

...the faithful have an instinct for the truth of the Gospel,
which enables them to recognise
and endorse authentic Christian doctrine and practice,
and to reject what is false...called the *sensus fidei*,
and it enables Christians to fulfil their prophetic calling.
(*Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*, International Theological Commission 2014, 2)

On the one hand, the *sensus fidei*
refers to the personal capacity of the believer,
within the communion of the Church, to discern the truth of faith.
On the other hand, the *sensus fidei* refers to a communal and ecclesial reality:
the instinct of faith of the Church herself,
by which she recognises her Lord and proclaims his word. ...
(*Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*, International Theological Commission 2014, 3)

Beloved, do not believe every spirit,
but test the spirits to see whether they are from God... (1 John 4:1).

As she awaits the return of her Lord,
the Church and her members are constantly confronted with new circumstances,
with the progress of knowledge and culture,
and with the challenges of human history,
and they have to read the signs of the times,
'to interpret them in the light of the divine Word', and to discern ...
the *sensus fidei fidelium* has an essential role to play.
(*Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*, International Theological Commission 2014, 70)

It can take a long time before this process of discernment comes to a conclusion...
patience and respect are needed ...
(*Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*, International Theological Commission 2014, 71)

From the beginning of Christianity,
all the faithful played an active role in the development of Christian belief.
The whole community bore witness to the apostolic faith,
and history shows that, when decisions about the faith needed to be taken,
the witness of the laity was taken into consideration by the pastors ...
(*Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*, International Theological Commission 2014, 72)

The holy people of God shares also in Christ's prophetic office; it spreads abroad a living witness to Him, especially by means of a life of faith and charity and by offering to God a sacrifice of praise, the tribute of lips which give praise to His name. The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole peoples' supernatural discernment in matters of faith when "from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful" they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals. That discernment in matters of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth. It is exercised under the guidance of the sacred teaching authority, in faithful and respectful obedience to which the people of God accepts that which is not just the word of men but truly the word of God. Through it, the people of God adheres unwaveringly to the faith given once and for all to the saints, penetrates it more deeply with right thinking, and applies it more fully in its life.

(Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, 12)

In all the baptized ... the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work ...

The people of God is holy thanks to this anointing, which makes it infallible *in credendo*.

This means that it does not err in faith, even though it may not find words to explain that faith.

The Spirit guides it in truth and leads it to salvation.

As part of his mysterious love for humanity,

God furnishes the totality of the faithful with an instinct of faith - *sensus fidei*

- which helps them to discern what is truly of God.

The presence of the Spirit gives Christians a certain connaturality with divine realities,

and a wisdom which enables them to grasp those realities intuitively,

even when they lack the wherewithal to give them precise expression.

(Pope Francis, *Evangelli Gaudium*, 119)

With A Discerning Heart

"The fruit of the Spirit

Is love, joy, peace, patience,

kindness, generosity, faithfulness,

gentleness and self-control."

(Galatians 5:22)

How am I to know the will of God?

Even where there is no other more explicit claim on my obedience,

such as a legitimate command,

the very nature of each situation usually bears written into itself

some indication of God's will.

For whatever is demanded by truth, by justice, by mercy, or by love

must surely be taken to be willed by God.

(Thomas Merton from 'New Seeds of Contemplation' in *Bridges to Contemplative Living*, p 76)

Do not fear the truth,

hard as it may appear,

grievously as it may hurt,

It is still right

and you were born for it.

If you go out to meet

and love it,

let it exercise your mind,

it is your best friend

and closest sister.

(Helder Camara, *Essential Writings*, 117)

The new networks of communication both inside and outside the Church

call for new forms of attention and critique, and the renewal of skills of discernment.

(*Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*, International Theological Commission 2014, 117)

May the Wind of Pentecost blow upon the work of the Synod,
on the Church, and on the whole of humanity.

May it untie the knots

which prevent people from encountering one another,

heal the wounds that bleed, and rekindle much hope;

there are so many people without hope!

May we be granted this creative charity which allows one to love as Jesus loved.

(Pope Francis, during the Meeting on the Family, Rome, 4 Oct 2014).

One general and basic condition is this: speak honestly.

Let no one say: 'I cannot say this, they will think this or this of me'...

It is necessary to say all that, in the Lord, one feels the need to say...

and at the same time, one must listen with humility and welcome, with an open heart....

(Pope Francis, Greeting to Synod Fathers, First General Congregation of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 6 Oct 2014)

If God created shadows it was to better emphasise the light.

(Attributed to Pope John XXIII)

A Gaze Fixed on Jesus

If we truly intend to walk among contemporary challenges,

the decisive condition is to maintain a fixed gaze on Jesus Christ,

to pause in contemplation and in adoration of his Face.

If we accept his way of thinking, of living and of relating,

we will never tire of translating the Synod work into guidelines and paths

for the pastoral care of the person and of the family.

Indeed, every time we return to the source of the Christian experience,

new paths and undreamed-of possibilities open up.

(Pope Francis, during the Meeting on the Family, Rome, 4 Oct 2014).

If only we Christians,

charged with the terrible responsibility of bearing the name of Christ,

if only we could at least really behave like brothers and sisters...

we who are brave and rash enough to bear the name of Christ,

what about us who call ourselves Christians? What a responsibility we have!

(Helder Camara, *Essential Writings*, 136)

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age,

especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted,

these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ.

Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts.

(Vatican II, *Gaudium et Spes*, 1)

Remember that you are never alone,

Christ is with you on your journey every day of your lives!

He has called you and chosen you to live in the freedom of the children of God.

Turn to him in prayer and in love.

Ask him to grant you the courage and strength to live in this freedom always.

Walk with him who is "the Way, the Truth and the Life"!

(Pope John Paul II, *Address at 12th World Youth Day*, 9, 1997)

...we must not forget that people came to Christ from every kind of background.

(Pope Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger), *Jesus of Nazareth*, 2013)

With Hope and the Power of Love

The one who has hope lives differently.

(Pope Benedict XVI, *Spe Salvi*, 2)

We must all believe in love and peace.

We must believe in the power of love.

We must recognize that our being itself is grounded in love;

that is to say, that we come into being

because we are loved

and because we are meant to love others.

(Thomas Merton, 'Honorable Reader', in *Bridges to Contemplative Living, Seven*, 17)

Consult not your fears but your hopes and your dreams.

Think not about your frustrations, but about your unfulfilled potential.

Concern yourself not with what you tried and failed in,

but with what it is still possible for you to do.

(Pope John XXIII (Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli), *Journal of a Soul*, 1954)

What unites us,

is much greater

than what divides us.

(Pope John XXIII, Quoted by Pope John Paul II : Address 'To the Catholic Bishops of the Russian Federation, 2001)

So you think that

because of her weaknesses,

Christ will forsake her?

The worse his church and ours

is marred by our failures,

the steadier he will support her

with his tender care.

He could not deny

his own body.

(Dom Helder Camara in *Essential Writings*, 110)

Christ is found not in loud and pompous declarations but in humble and fraternal dialogue.

He is found less in a truth that is imposed than in a truth that is shared....

(Thomas Merton, 'A Letter to Pablo Cuadra Concerning Giants' in *Bridges to Contemplative Living, Seven*, p 31)

Hope without risk

is not hope,

which is believing

in risky loving,

trusting others

in the dark,

the blind leap

letting God take over.

(Dom Helder Camara, 'Hope Without Risk' in *Essential Writings*, 103)

There are times when the burden of need and our own limitations might tempt us to become discouraged.

But precisely then we are helped by the knowledge that, in the end, we are only instruments in the Lord's hands;

and this knowledge frees us from the presumption of thinking that we alone are personally responsible for building a

better world. In all humility we will do what we can, and in all humility we will entrust the rest to the Lord. It is God

who governs the world, not we. We offer him our service only to the extent that we can, and for as long as he grants

us the strength. To do all we can with what strength we have, however, is the task which keeps the good servant of

Jesus Christ always at work: "The love of Christ urges us on" (2 Cor 5:14).

(Pope Benedict XVI, *God Is Love: Deus Caritas Est*, 35)

For A Better World – God’s Kingdom Come

As a Church which “journeys together” with men and women, sharing the travails of history, let us cherish the dream that a rediscovery of the inviolable dignity of peoples and of the function of authority as service will also be able to help civil society to be built up in justice and fraternity, and thus bring about a more beautiful and humane world for coming generations.
(Pope Francis, Address at Ceremony Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, 2015)

We constantly have to broaden our horizons and see the greater good which will benefit us all. But this has to be done without evasion or uprooting. We need to sink our roots deeper into the fertile soil and history of our native place, which is a gift of God. We can work on a small scale, in our own neighbourhood, but with a larger perspective.
(Pope Francis, Evangelii Gaudium, 235)

Our gaze also extends to humanity as a whole.
A synodal Church is like a standard lifted up among the nations
...As a Church which “journeys together” with men and women, sharing the travails of history, let us cherish the dream that a rediscovery of the inviolable dignity of peoples and of the function of authority as service will also be able to help civil society to be built up in justice and fraternity, and thus bring about a more beautiful and humane world for coming generations.
(Pope Francis, Address at the 50th Anniversary of the Institution of the Synod of Bishops, 2015)

Acknowledgements:

As noted and: Dom Helder Camara in *Dom Helder Camara: Essential Writings*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009; Dorothy Day ‘On Pilgrimage’ in *Bridges to contemplative living with Thomas Merton, Seven, Adjusting Your Life’s Vision*. Ed J Montaldo & R.G. Toth, Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press, 2011; Ormond Rush, ‘Plenary Council Participation and Reception: Synodality and Discerning the Sensus Fidelium’, www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au ‘Resources’; Plenary Council 2020 website: www.plenarycouncil.catholic.org.au; Pope Benedict XVI (Joseph Ratzinger), *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration*, Ignatius Press, 2013; Pope Francis, Greeting to Synod Fathers, First General Congregation of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 6 Oct 2014; Pope John Paul II, Address at 12th World Youth Day, 1997; Pope John XXIII Quoted by Pope John Paul II in his address ‘To the Catholic Bishops of the Russian Federation on Their ‘Ad Limina’ Visit, 2001; Pope John XXIII, Opening Speech to the Second Vatican Council in St Peter’s, Vatican, 11 October 1962; Pope John XXIII, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, *Journal of a Soul: The Autobiography of Pope John XXIII* (1954), Ignatius Press, 1999; Thomas Merton, quoted in “Bridges to Contemplative Living With Thomas Merton” Series, Ed J Montaldo & R.G. Toth, Notre Dame, Indiana: Ave Maria Press: Book One, *Entering the school of your experience*. 2010 and Book Seven *Adjusting Your Life’s Vision*. 2011.

Plenary Council Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit of Pentecost.
Come, Holy Spirit of the great South Land.

O God, bless and unite all your people in Australia
and guide us on the pilgrim way of the Plenary Council.

Give us the grace to see your face in one another
and to recognise Jesus, our companion on the road.

Give us the courage to tell our stories
and to speak boldly of your truth.

Give us ears to listen humbly to each other
and a discerning heart to hear what you are saying.

Lead your Church into a hope-filled future,
that we may live the joy of the Gospel.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord,
bread for the journey from age to age.

Amen.

Our Lady Help of Christians, pray for us.
St Mary MacKillop, pray for us.



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