

Pastoral Message: October 10, 2021

This Sunday Pope Francis opens up the Synod on Synodality. We begin a two year process where, as a universal church, we journey closely together listening to where the Holy Spirit is guiding our church into the future. We have had difficult days in the church and in our world in this pandemic, and so we are called to be especially attentive to how our earth has suffered and how people have suffered during this difficult time. I would like to reflect on the scriptures and what they might be offering us as a church as we begin the synod.

In the reading from Wisdom, Solomon knows his own weakness and has an openness to being led by this gift of wisdom that would guide in making good decisions. This Spirit in the book Wisdom, that we call the Holy Spirit, is understood as a she since she is referred to as Lady Sophia. Solomon desires Her more than power, wealth, health and beauty. The synod calls us to seek out this Holy Spirit and to allow it to direct us. We certainly can be tempted to put power, wealth, health and beauty first. When we put the Holy Spirit first, it has a way of purifying our motives that can be selfish, but it also invites us into a true freedom. If guided by this Spirit as we begin this synod as a universal church, we will be able to make decisions with the right motivation. I would suggest that this first reading calls us to allow this Holy Spirit to transform and guide us.

The psalm reminds us of our frailty as humans and the call to not put off till tomorrow the most important things we are called to do today.

The reading from Hebrews reminds us of the power of God's word that really gets at the heart of things and has a way of opening us up to really see. We may read the scriptures, but we should also remember that they have a way of opening us up to our truest selves. As we begin this synod, Pope Francis often reflects on the *unruly* word of God; that when guided by it, it may lead us down paths we never thought we would go. This unruly word of God is an invitation for us to be open to the new trails that as a church we may be called to blaze so that the good news can reach human hearts in today's world.

With the gospel, perhaps it is helpful if we see ourselves as this young man who Jesus looks at with love. The problem is his wealth is making him unfree, and Jesus is inviting him into the freedom and joy of his mission. We might reflect ourselves on what is in our lives that is stopping us from experiencing true freedom and joy. These are not always necessarily bad things and can be used for good. It is when they come before the Lord that they can hold us back though.

I would suggest, as we begin this synod, we can also take Pope Francis' words from his papacy to heart, that he wants a poor church for the poor. If we believe that entering this Synod, what, as a church, do we need to let go of? Certainly we can see where wealth and abuse of power has caused problems in our church and hurt others. The synod is to be a time of healing for those wounds. We also may be being called to change structures so that we can carry out the vision of the reign of God in our world. Let's be open as we begin this journey. We can allow it to be a time for us to heal, grow personally, as a local community, and as a universal church. Let's begin this journey with an openness and readiness to let go of what we need to in order to truly follow Jesus.