



## **DIOCESAN SYNOD INAUGURAL MASS CATHEDRAL OF THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY DIOCESE OF LAS CRUCES, SOUTHERN NEW MEXICO SATURDAY, OCTOBER 16, 5:30PM**

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Along with the Universal Church the Diocese of Las Cruces is embarking on the synodal journey.<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis last Saturday invoked the Holy Spirit on the People of God so that we will be able to move forward together, to listen to one another and discern our times, in solidarity with the struggles and aspirations of all humanity.

The Pope prayed on the eve of the official inauguration of the diocesan phase of the Synod for all the dioceses around the world, marked by a solemn Mass in Rome's St. Peter's Square last Sunday, Oct. 10. Dioceses across the world are inaugurating the synodal journey at the local level this weekend.

### **A special Synod**

The theme of the upcoming 16th Synod of Bishops is: “**For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission**”. Synodality indicates walking together and listening to one another but above all to the Holy Spirit. To deepen this essential characteristic of the Church, the upcoming synod is unlike any previous one. It starts with, and involves all the faithful at local Churches across the world, promising to listen to all, especially to laity. That is why this Synod is a 2-year process, starting from October 10, 2021, to October 2023.

The diocesan listening phase will run until April 2022 and will be followed by a continental phase from September 2022 to March 2023. The final “universal Church phase” will culminate in the traditional assembly of the Synod of Bishops in the Vatican in October 2023.

### **The protagonist of the Synod – the Holy Spirit**

Pope Francis has dwelt on how the synodality of the Church is achieved, namely, through communion, participation, and mission. He also pointed out the dangers the synodality process can run into, as well as the opportunities it offers.

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<sup>1</sup> *Adapted from Robin Gomes – Vatican News*

He said: *“In the one People of God, therefore, let us journey together, in order to experience a Church that receives and lives this gift of unity, and is open to the voice of the Spirit,”* and he stressed that the Synod is an “ecclesial moment”, not a parliament, nor an investigation into opinions, but “an ecclesial moment” whose protagonist is the Holy Spirit. “Without the Spirit, there is no Synod,” Pope Francis stressed.

### **Communion, participation, mission**

Pope Francis also explained the Synod’s three key words - communion, participation, and mission: he said that communion and mission describe the mystery (the Physical sign of a hidden reality) which indeed is the Church. Communion expresses the very nature of the Church, according to the Second Vatican Council.

According to Saint Paul VI “communion, that is, cohesion and interior fullness, in grace, truth and collaboration... and mission, that is, apostolic commitment to (which is real involvement in) the world of today.” (emphasis added) Saint John Paul II stressed that *koinonia* gives rise to the Church’s mission of serving as a sign of the human family’s intimate union with God. For this reason, Pope Francis said, Synods must be well prepared for, especially at the local level with the participation of all.

### **All are called to participate**

Pope Francis pointed out that ‘communion’ and ‘mission’ can risk remaining somewhat abstract, unless synodality is concretely expressed at every step of the synodal journey and activity, encouraging real involvement on the part of each and all. “All the baptized are called to take part in the Church’s life and mission.”

Pope Francis acknowledged the frustration and impatience felt by many pastoral workers, members of diocesan and parish consultative bodies, and women, who frequently remain on the fringes. *“Enabling everyone to participate is an essential ecclesial duty!”* he stressed, adding, it is an indispensable ecclesial commitment based on the “identity card” (sort of “driving license”/passport!) of each one’s baptism.

### **Three risks to avoid**

The Pope warned that a Synod can run the risk of being a mere formal external event, instead of being *“a process of authentic spiritual discernment that we undertake, not (meant) to project a good image of ourselves, but to cooperate more effectively with the work of God in history”*. For this, he added *“we need content, means, and structures that can facilitate dialogue and interaction within the People of God, especially between priests and laity”*.

He noted that at times the clergy distance themselves from the laity, which makes them the “lord of the house” and not a shepherd. This, the Pope said, requires changing certain overly vertical, distorted, and partial visions of the Church, (of) the priestly ministry, (of) the role of the laity, (of) ecclesial responsibilities, (of) roles of governance, and so forth.

Then (*secondly*) there is the risk that a Synod can run into is becoming intellectual, offering learned but abstract approaches to the problems of the Church and the evils in our world, which are far removed from the reality of the holy People of God and the concrete life of communities around the world.

A third danger that a Synod should avoid, the Pope said, is the temptation to complacency, which says, “*we have always done it this way*” and it is better not to change. The word ‘complacency’ he said “is a poison in the life of the Church”. People with such an attitude apply old solutions to new problems. The Holy Father stressed that the synodal process should involve the local Churches, in different phases and from the bottom up, in an exciting and engaging effort that can forge a style of communion and participation directed to mission”.

### **Three opportunities**

Pope Francis pointed out that the synodal process of encounter, listening, and reflection help the People of God, the Church, to recognize at least three opportunities. First, it must move not occasionally but structurally towards a synodal Church, where all can feel at home and participate.

Second, the Synod offers us the opportunity to become a listening Church, to break out of our routine in order to stop and listen, firstly to the Spirit in adoration and prayer, and then to our brothers and sisters, their hopes, the crises of faith around the world, the need for renewed pastoral life.

Keeping in mind that God’s style is one of closeness, compassion and tenderness, the Pope said the Synod is also an occasion for the People of God not to be aloof but to become a Church of closeness by her very presence, bandaging wounds and healing broken hearts with the balm of God.

### **Not another Church but a different Church**

For this, the Holy Father said, we need the ever new breath of God, the Spirit, who sets us free from every form of self-absorption, revives what is moribund (/dying), loosens shackles, and spreads joy. “There is no need to create another Church, but to create a different Church,” the Pope said. For a ‘different Church’, the Pope urged all to invoke the Holy Spirit with greater fervor and frequency and humbly listen to Him.

*Let us now together invoke the Holy Spirit as in union with Pope Francis and the Universal Church we embark on the synodal journey.*

**2021 – 2022 Prayer for the Worldwide Synod  
Celebrated in the Diocese of Las Cruces**

*We stand before You, Holy Spirit, as we gather together in Your name.  
With You alone to guide us, make Yourself at home in our hearts;  
Teach us the way we must go and how we are to pursue it.  
We are weak and sinful; do not let us promote disorder.  
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path  
Nor partiality influence our actions.  
Let us find in You our unity so that we may journey together to eternal life  
And not stray from the way of truth and what is right.  
All this we ask of You, who are at work in every place and time,  
In the communion of the Father and the Son, forever and ever. Amen.*

+ *Peter Baldacchino*

+ Most Reverend Peter Baldacchino  
Bishop of Las Cruces