

My first assignment as a priest was in a parish that previously had two assistant priests, but I was assigned there alone, with a slacker pastor, in the biggest parish.

I had an unbelievable amount of work to do; poor me. And then the slacker pastor gave me the once-a-week task to mop and bleach the basement floor, where Fifi the rectory dog did its business.

Why didn't I tell the pastor to take this job and shove it? I wanted to, and I would've, if a friend hadn't told me to cowboy-up, that this was spiritual medicine for my soul, sin-sick from selfish pride.

Whenever we're afflicted with a death-dealing spiritual sickness, God, prompted only by Divine Love, spoons out whatever medicine is needed for our healing, sometimes bitter, sometimes sweet.

Our Holy Father Francis (may the Lord protect him) has been trying to help us see that the Church is afflicted with the death-dealing spiritual sickness called clericalism...

The belief that because a man is ordained deacon, priest or bishop, set apart for the things of God, he is also as a consequence better, superior, beyond reproach, and entitled to preference and deference.

Clericalism inspires such chestnuts as: nothing's too good for the bishop; Father never picks up the check; don't talk bad about the priest; it's my parish, you just pray, pay and obey. Groan.

Our Holy Father Francis is also pointing us toward an antidote that God prescribes for clericalism, which just happens to be the very same subject for the upcoming Synod: synodality...

A fancy-pants way of saying that all the baptized have a *right* to speak, be heard, and be taken seriously, and that it isn't only a cleric who can discern the movement of the Spirit.

To be clear, synodality involves outside-the-box thinking, but it's not a free-for-all; the Spirit that inspired Scripture and Tradition can't at the same time direct the Church to move in a contrary way.

It also says that all the baptized have a *duty* to be co-workers in mission, with clerics tasked with matching the needs of ministry with the gifts of the baptized, and then preparing them to succeed.

As a new priest, I could've used synodality, preparing the laity to help with the Fifi chore. Or, to make me too ashamed to say, these hands are made for chalices, not for cleaning up after Fifi.

Synodality. It isn't a bitter medicine, but sweet, unless of course we're promoters and defenders of clericalism, not able to see a cleric as the last of all, the servant of all. May it *not* be so. Amen.