



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF FORT WORTH
THE BISHOP'S OFFICE



Homily for the Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Opening Mass of the Diocesan Synodal Process
October 17, 2021
Saint Patrick's Cathedral
Fort Worth, Texas

Isaiah 53:10-11

Psalm 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22

Hebrews 4:14-16

Mark 10:35-45

Synod is a word from Greek that means a meeting of people. In 1965, as a means of the continuing implementation of the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, Pope Saint Paul VI created a new structure of the Holy See called the Synod of Bishops, and he planned for that standing office to organize regular meetings of bishops from around the world who would be given a topic to address by the Pope and then make recommendations based on their deliberations.

In the 56 years since the Synod of Bishops was created, it has met a total of 29 times and considered a wide array of subjects, and meetings of the Synod of Bishops have often given rise to important teaching documents for the whole Church which were written on the basis of the Synod's work and then promulgated by the Pope.

Last week in Rome, Pope Francis opened a two-year preparation for the next meeting of the Synod of Bishops which will be in Rome in 2023, and the reason for the long-range opening is that the Pope has asked every bishop in the world to conduct a consultation with the priests, deacons, religious, and laity of his diocese on the general topic of how the Church is governed. Each bishop then is asked to submit a report based on these consultations. What Pope Francis did last Sunday in Rome every other diocesan bishop and I am doing today — beginning the process of consultation that will culminate in two years in Rome with the actual meeting and work of the Synod of Bishops.

In the months ahead more information will be available on our diocesan website about how to participate in this consultation, but for now I want simply to draw your attention to the fact of this Synod and ask your prayers for the wisdom and holiness of the entire College of Bishops and its head, the Bishop of Rome, Pope Francis. I want to emphasize that the truth of the Gospel is not a matter for committee discussion and cannot be changed by the vote of any group in the Church, so no one should imagine that this synodal process can change anything included in the deposit of faith that in the words of the Epistle of Saint Jude “was once for all delivered to the saints.” Such unchangeable points of doctrine include but are not limited to the immutable nature of marriage as involving one man and one woman that is permanent, faithful, and open to God's gift of children; the inherent evil of abortion and contraception; the inherent evil of homosexual acts; the necessity of biological maleness for reception of Holy Orders; and the inadmissibility of divorce and remarriage.

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Thus, the forthcoming synod is not a referendum on the Sacred Scriptures, the Apostolic Tradition, or the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. It is not a worldwide townhall whereby activists organize and lobby for their own agenda regarding the Church. It is instead an invitation and opportunity to consider the many ways in which all the baptized are responsible for fulfilling the Great Commission to proclaim the Gospel to the ends of the earth and the end of days for the salvation of the world by the Lord Jesus Christ. The work of the Church, and therefore the work of any true synod in the Church, is to work to conform herself to Christ her Lord. Likewise, it is the work of Church and synod not to make the Church more “popular” but to make Christ known and loved.

The readings from the *Book of Isaiah* and the *Letter to the Hebrews* place their focus clearly upon Jesus Christ, the Savior of the World, the promised Messiah, the great high priest. The “suffering servant” spoken of by the prophet Isaiah reveals the authentic nature of the mission of Jesus Christ — to suffer and to be rejected for the salvation of the many. Isaiah’s revelation is intended to prepare God’s chosen people Israel — the People of God — for the true Messiah and not for a military king who will avenge them against the oppression they’ve suffered at the hands of other tribes and nations.

The suffering of Christ is at the heart of human redemption that is brought about by the offering of it as a sacrifice by Jesus who is both priest and victim of the sacrifice. Because Jesus is truly God and fully human, He is the only one who is able of offering such a sacrifice capable of remitting all human sins for all time and to make satisfaction in both perfect justice and perfect mercy. His justice and mercy reveal God’s perfect and selfless love and also reveal how we can love God fittingly in return as human beings created in His image and likeness and baptized into His priestly people, the Church, the People of God.

The centrality of Christ as recorded in each of these readings — the suffering servant from Isaiah in the Old Testament and Jesus Christ, the High Priest, in the *Letter to the Hebrews* in the New Testament, is overlooked by the Apostles James and John as recorded in today’s reading from Mark’s Gospel. James and John go to Jesus and request that He do for them what they ask. They are looking for Christ to do what they want which is to give them their way — which involves power, glory, and status. This cannot be the way in which we approach our helpful consultation for the Synod of Bishops when they meet with the Pope in 2023. Pope Francis offers us three words for our participation in this listening process: Encounter, Listen, and Discern.

Encounter. Jesus encounters not only James and John but also the other 10 apostles who are indignant over the ambition of James and John. But Jesus does not simply encounter them as a peer, He encounters them as a friend and teacher who offers them guidance and direction out of their own partisanship and into the call of selflessness required for discipleship and ministry. As Pope Francis stated last week, “we too are called to become experts in the *art of encounter*. Not so much by organizing events or theorizing about problems, as in taking time to encounter the Lord and one another. Time to devote to prayer and to Adoration – that form of prayer that we so often neglect – devoting time to Adoration, and to hearing what the Spirit wants to say to the Church.”

Listen. Jesus listens to the request of James and John and the indignation of the other 10 disciples. He listens with compassion. While Jesus listens to them where they are, He loves them too much to simply leave them where they are in their ambition and their selfishness. Jesus listens with the heart, as we should listen in imitation of Him. As Pope Francis stated last week, Jesus “did not give a non-committal reply or offer a prepackaged solution; He did not pretend to respond politely, simply as a way of dismissing [others] and continuing on His way. Jesus simply listens, for whatever amount of time it takes; He is not rushed. Most importantly, He is not afraid *to listen ... with His heart* and not just with His ears.” Jesus tells James and

John and the 10 other Apostles the truth; to do otherwise would be to treat them unjustly, an impossibility for Christ.

Discernment. Finally, Jesus' response to James and John is made in the form of a question of discernment: "Can you drink the chalice that I am going to drink?" It is a question that involves a serious commitment. Their response is not one made in easy presumption, for it is asked of them by Jesus. Their answer is one made in the faith of His disciples, called by name, and in direct discourse between Christ and His disciples. They answer 'yes' because they know Jesus and they know that He knows them. "We are," they respond in faith and in the confidence in Christ who has called them. The chalice from which James will drink is the chalice of service, the chalice of martyrdom, the chalice of unconditional love, the chalice of the Cross, the Chalice of Christ.

I ask especially that we begin to pray now for the guidance of the Holy Spirit during this period of preparation for the Synod. This is the most important thing that we are called to do. I pray that this period will be one in which we grow in our attentiveness to Christ who already is the fullness of revelation, and that we come to a greater awareness of how we can best present the truth of the Gospel and the Deposit of Faith in a fresh way by which all might hear and embrace Christ and His Gospel with renewed vigor, especially here in the 28 counties of the Diocese of Fort Worth.