

**Opening Mass of the Synodal Journey  
for the Synod on Synodality  
in the Archdiocese of Vancouver**

Holy Rosary Cathedral

24 October 2021

Dear brother priests, deacons, consecrated men and women,  
seminarians, brothers and sisters, dear friends all in Our Lord Jesus  
Christ:

***Introduction***

The good Lord has gathered us in our Cathedral this afternoon to begin an historic synodal process in preparation for the Synod of Bishops that will be held in Rome, two years from now, in October 2023. Its theme will be: “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission.”

***What Is the Synod and the Synodal Process?***

The Archdiocese of Vancouver is no stranger to the role of a synod in the Church’s life. On May 4, 1997, Archbishop Adam Exner released his pastoral letter “Toward a New Springtime,” which set the Archdiocese on a nine-year journey. This synodal process, that many of you took part in, culminated with the Final Synod Assembly and Declaration on the Synod on December 3, 2006. Today we are embarking on a different process, a journey with the universal Church guided by the Holy Father.

The word “Synod” comes from the Greek word that means both an assembly of persons and a journey taken together of mind, heart, and spirit, one aimed at discerning God’s will for his Church.

Likewise, the word “synodality” refers to those habits of mind, heart and spirit needed for us to participate fruitfully in discussions that will manifest and deepen the unity in communion so necessary for advancing the Church’s mission.

Echoing both Scripture and Tradition, Pope Francis speaks of synodality as a constitutive dimension of the Church’s life, not as an innovation. It is a way of describing how the Church, as a communion of believers – the Body of Christ and the People of God, united around the Eucharist – cooperates effectively with God’s plan for his Church in history.

What the Archdiocese will be undertaking in the coming months – at least until the Spring – is a process of spiritual discernment that will unfold in adoration, prayer and obedience to the Word of God and the Church’s teaching.<sup>1</sup> Because it’s a process, many meetings will be involved among priests, deacons, consecrated women and men, and laity, among people of all ages and cultures. Listening and dialogue will

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Francis, Homily (10 October 2021).

take place in parishes, religious communities, and associations regionally and across the Archdiocese.<sup>2</sup>

Here's a sample of the kinds of questions the various groups will be asked, so that a ten-page summary can be drawn up for the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops:

1. What helps or prevents you from being active in the Church's mission?
2. What areas of the Church's mission are we missing or neglecting?
3. What particular issues in the Church do we need to pay more attention to?
4. What particular issues in society do we need to pay more attention to?
5. How can we, the local Church, journey with our Indigenous brothers and sisters in a process of healing and reconciliation?
6. From this time of listening, could you sum up in one or two sentences how the Spirit is calling us to grow in "journeying together" in our Church in Vancouver?

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<sup>2</sup>. Cf. Archbishop William E. Lori, Homily (17 October 2021).

In coming weeks and months, under the direction of our Chancellor, Barb Dowding, and the team she is working with, we will all be learning how to put this synodal way – this “synodality” – into practice, so that, in years to come, it will become more of a habit. Admittedly, it seems right now that Rome has thrown us into the deep end of the pool. However, let’s remember that this is only the first attempt using a process that the Pope hopes will characterize the Church’s future life. We’re all learning together, and it will be a challenge.

It’s a daunting task, but a necessary one. I believe that at all costs we have to avoid “the mistake of not taking seriously the times in which we are living” and of trying to apply “old solutions to new problems.”<sup>3</sup>

We also have to keep from thinking that the Synod and the synodal process mimic parliamentary debate, are just elaborate opinion polls or are study groups for those learned in theology or Church affairs. Quite the contrary, Francis says unequivocally that everyone is called to participate, because “the Synod is an ecclesial event and its protagonist is the Holy Spirit.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>. Francis, Opening Address for the Synod (9 October 2021).

<sup>4</sup>. Francis, Opening Address for the Synod (9 October 2021).

## ***The Synodal Process in Light of Today's Gospel***

Now, let me offer just two reflections on the synodal process as it will unfold in the Archdiocese. Based in today's Gospel, they point to listening to others and to encountering Jesus. What light does this account shed on how we should think and act in a "synodal way"?

### ***1. Be an Attentive, Listening Community***

Bartimaeus is an abandoned, blind beggar on the periphery of Jericho. No one listens to him. When he tries to speak, everyone tells him to keep quiet (cf. Mk 10:48). Jesus, however, invites him to speak: "What do you want me to do for you?" (Mk 10:51). It isn't hard to guess that Bartimaeus wants to regain his sight, and be rid of all the problems caused by blindness. Nonetheless, Jesus takes his time; he takes time to listen. This is the first step in any journey of faith: listening. "It is the apostolate of the ear: listening before speaking."<sup>5</sup>

### ***Our Call to Listen: This is Synodality***

So it is in our process of synodality. Jesus likewise wants to hear our needs as individuals and communities. He wants us to talk about our lives in the Church, our real situations, painful or joyful as they may be, so that nothing is kept from him.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Francis, Homily (28 October 2018).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Francis, Homily (25 October 2015).

We are not to be like those who ordered Bartimaeus to be quiet (cf. Mk 10: 48). For such disciples, a person in need was a nuisance. They preferred their own timetable above that of Jesus, their own talking over listening to others. Although they were following Jesus, they had their own plans in mind.

How important it will be for us to listen patiently and lovingly to one another when we come together, just as God listens to us and to our prayers, however repetitive they may be. Let's ask now for the grace of a heart that listens. Like Jesus, let's not be rushed in our response to others. Most important, we can't be afraid to listen with our heart and not just with our ears. Whenever we listen with the heart, others feel that they are being heard, and not judged; they feel free to recount their own experiences and their spiritual journey.<sup>7</sup>

Pope Francis puts these questions to us:

Are we good at listening? How good is the “hearing” of our heart? Do we allow people to express themselves, to walk in faith even though they have had difficulties in life, and to be part of the life of the community without being hindered, rejected or judged? . . . It is a slow and perhaps tiring

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Francis, Homily (10 October 2021).

exercise, this learning to listen to one another – bishops, priests, religious and laity, all the baptized – and to avoid artificial and shallow and pre-packaged responses. . . . Let us not soundproof our hearts; let us not remain barricaded in our certainties.<sup>8</sup>

The Synod, then, offers us the opportunity to become a listening Church in the Archdiocese of Vancouver, to break out of our routine and pause from our everyday concerns in order to stop and listen.

## ***2. Personal Encounter of Jesus with Bartimaeus***

Now to the second point: the importance of encounter in the synodal process: with Jesus and with others. Look at Jesus in this afternoon’s Gospel. He wants to meet personally with Bartimaeus. “Call him here” (Mk 10:49), the Lord says to his disciples.

He doesn’t delegate someone from the “large crowd” (Mk 10:46) following him to take care of the blind beggar. Jesus is completely taken up with Bartimaeus. He doesn’t try to sidestep him.<sup>9</sup> The Lord doesn’t stand aloof. He doesn’t appear annoyed or disturbed. Instead, he is

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<sup>8</sup> Francis, Homily (10 October 2021).

<sup>9</sup> Francis, Homily (10 October 2021).

completely present to Bartimaeus. “He knows that someone’s life can be changed by a single encounter.”<sup>10</sup>

***Our Call to Encounter: This Is Synodality***

We are all called to carry out God’s work in the way Jesus shows us; that is, in closeness to him and in communion with our brothers and sisters. As we begin this process of synodality, we too are called to become experts in the art of encounter; that is, we must take time to encounter the Lord and one another. We encounter him in prayer and adoration, so that we can hear what the Spirit wants to say to the Church. As we journey together, we also need to take the time to look others in the eye and listen to what they have to say, to build rapport with them, to be sensitive to their questions, and to let ourselves be enriched by the variety of their charisms and ministries.<sup>11</sup>

Today’s Gospel shows us an attitude that hinders our willingness truly to encounter others in the synodal process. Unlike Jesus, the disciples continued to walk by Bartimaeus, going on as if nothing was happening. If Bartimaeus was blind, they were deaf. His problem was not their problem.

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<sup>10</sup>. Francis, Homily (10 October 2021).

<sup>11</sup>. Cf. Francis, Homily (28 October 2018).



For us, this attitude of indifference is a danger that can easily hinder the fruitfulness of our synodal process. Faced as we are with so many problems, we might be tempted to think that it's better just to move on, to not be bothered by yet another time-consuming meeting. In this way, just like the disciples, we are with Jesus, but we don't think and act like him.<sup>12</sup> Quite simply, we can be disinterested in the call to encounter others. We can be happy, so we think, in our own little group, but are "deaf to the clamour of so many people in need of salvation, in need of Jesus' help, in need of the Church."<sup>13</sup>

### ***Conclusion***

Dear brothers and sisters: let's pray that our engagement with the synodal process now beginning will be a true season of the Spirit and a grace-filled initiative! We need the creative breath of the Holy Spirit, who frees us from every form of self-absorption, revives what is moribund and spreads joy. May the Holy Spirit guide us where God wants the Church to be, not to where our own ideas and personal tastes would lead us.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>. Cf. Francis, Homily (25 October 2015).

<sup>13</sup>. Francis, Morning Meditation (28 May 2015).

<sup>14</sup>. Cf. Francis, Opening Address for the Synod (9 October 2021).

In the months and years ahead, we must keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and on our brothers and sisters. Together we are searching for the paths that the Gospel indicates for our times, so that we can bring Jesus to the world and the world to Jesus. Let us follow the path that the Lord wants.

Now, before continuing with the Eucharist, we entrust the work of our synodal process to the maternal intercession of Mary, Queen of the Holy Rosary. Amen.

✦ J. Michael Miller, CSB  
Archbishop of Vancouver