Opinion

Guest Voices



Pope Francis greets Archbishop Paul Etienne of the Archdiocese of Seattle, Washington, during a meeting with bishops from Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and Alaska making their "ad limina" visits to the Vatican Feb. 3, 2020. (CNS/Vatican Media)



by Paul Etienne

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I look forward to October this year! While it entails being absent from my beloved Archdiocese of Seattle for four weeks this fall, there is something inside me which says the next two Octobers will be significant in my life and in the life of the church I love and serve. I will be attending the first assembly of the synod on synodality in Rome, being held from Oct. 4-29.

I'm too young to remember much about the Second Vatican Council, and I am too old not to be concerned about so much of its vision yet to be addressed by our church. One of its greatest insights was the need to gather to address the challenges of the times. The council fathers knew that the world and church were changing or in need of change. They also knew that there would be a need for a modality by which our church could continue to review and address the changes as they occurred. Their solution? Synods.

Pope Francis has chosen the topic of synodality for this synod. So, what does synodality mean? What does it mean to become a more synodal church? The word "synod" literally means to be together on a path. In March 2018, the International Theological Commission published the results of their study of the topic of synodality in the life and mission of the church. Here is a helpful sentence from their work:

> The normative sources for the synodal life of the Church in Scripture and Tradition show that at the heart of God's plan of salvation the whole human race's call to union with God and unity in Him is fulfilled in Jesus Christ and brought about through the ministry of the Church (Paragraph 11).



(Unsplash/Jacob Stone)

I hear the words of the Risen Jesus as the synod draws ever closer: "Peace. Do not be afraid. Receive the Holy Spirit." Knowing that synodality is a community of faith seeking to know the Father's will by prayerfully reflecting on the Word of God, listening to the Holy Spirit, that we might more perfectly embody Christ as church, all guided by sacred Scripture and tradition, what is there to fear? This is the church at prayer!

St. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians invites us to live in a manner worthy of our calling, striving to preserve the unity of the spirit. He is mindful of the gifts God has bestowed upon the church through Christ. These gifts are given to equip the members of the church for ministry, that we might build up the body of Christ, growing to full maturity, which is to live the truth in love, being conformed more and more to Christ (see Ephesians 4:1-16).

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Synodality involves all the baptized, recognizing their unique gifts and the sense of faith that is present in each of the baptized. Thus, the synodal process began two years ago seeking the input of all the baptized. Synodality involves the communion of the entire people of God, who are co-responsible for the life and mission of the church. Thus, we journey together in faith along the paths of this life on our journey to God's kingdom, by the way that is Jesus Christ.

There are two keys to this synod which I find helpful. First, the real protagonist of the synod is the Holy Spirit. We long to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to the church today. Finally, the goal of the synod is not to produce a document, rather as the working document says: The goal "will be to continue to animate the synodal process in the ordinary life of the Church, identifying which pathways the Spirit invites us to walk along more decisively as one People of God" (Paragraph 3).



A likeness of the Holy Spirit is seen at the Cathedral of St. Paul in St. Paul, Minnesota. (CNS/The Catholic Spirit/Dave Hrbacek)

I consider it a privilege to have been invited to participate in this synod and look forward to daily gathering with members of the universal church to listen to God's word, to pray and reflect about the present realities of the church and the world to which we are sent to bear witness to the Risen Christ. I have spent the past several weeks renewing my prayer life, longing for greater receptivity to the voice of the Holy Spirit, to better discern in communion with the other synod delegates and our Holy Father, Francis, how best to carry out the mission of the church today.

I invite you to join all of us with your prayers.

> God the Father, your will make known,
> Through your Holy Word, Jesus Christ your Son,
> By the whispering, promptings, and power of your Holy Spirit,
> Through the intercession of our Mother Mary,
>
> Amen.

This story appears in the **Synod on Synodality** feature series. View the full series.
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