

October 17, 2021

11:30 a.m.

St. Augustine Cathedral

**Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time/Opening Mass of the Synod on  
Synodality/Votive Mass of the Holy Spirit**

**At the beginning of Mass: Introductory Comments**

I'm so happy to welcome all of you here to our beautiful St. Augustine Cathedral as we celebrate this, the 29<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time.

Today, is also another very special day throughout the Universal Church. Last Sunday in Rome, Pope Francis launched a three-year "Synodal Process", which is focused on discerning what the Holy Spirit is asking of the Catholic Church for our generation and for generations to come. The reason it is a 3-year process is because, for the first time in our modern history, the entire Church is being asked to actively participate in a "Synodal process". In one way or another, every practicing Catholic in the world will have an opportunity to express their thoughts, hopes and dreams for the Church from their own lived experience. In addition, the Holy Father also wants us to "listen" to all those who are NOT practicing their Faith, for whatever reason, as well as those who may not be practicing any Faith at all, so they can share their "spiritual stories".

As such, every Diocese in the world is asked to formally launch a Synod in each Diocese to last from today until Easter. And so, I am very excited, with this Mass, to officially declare our Diocesan Synod "Open". The theme of this Synod is: *"For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission"* (as you can see on the front of today's Worship Aide).

I also want to warmly welcome the representatives of every Parish throughout the Diocese who have come here to the Cathedral for this special Mass, and who will participate in an Orientation gathering following today's Mass in the Crowley Center. I am so pleased that you can join us this morning, and I am very grateful for your willingness to at least consider how you might be able to participate in the Listening Sessions that we will begin conducting around the Diocese in the near future. I, and the Synod Coordinating Team, will make sure that we keep everyone informed about all the particular aspects of the Synod as they are

determined, and to make available the appropriate information to help you participate if you choose to do so.

As Pope Francis said last week in Rome: *“Participating in a synod means placing ourselves on the same path as the Word made flesh. It means following in his footsteps, listening to his word along with the words of others. It means discovering with amazement that the Holy Spirit always surprises us, to suggest fresh paths and new ways of speaking.”* Therefore, he concluded: *“Let us not ‘soundproof’ our hearts; let us not remain barricaded in our certainties. Let us listen to one another.”*

In the very near future, we will begin a series of “Listening Sessions” throughout the Diocese for the purpose of *listening* for the Holy Spirit’s guidance, and of *listening* to one another, on our Journey of Faith. This is what the word “synod” means—to journey together; we are fellow travelers with the rest of the Church---all of whom are on this Journey through this world, and at the end of our lives in this world, we pray that Journey leads us to our Eternal Destiny of Heaven. And just as we are already doing in our diocesan *Jubilee Year of the Holy Spirit*, during this Synod we need to intently ask for the Holy Spirit’s guidance, inspiration, and for the outpouring of the Spirit’s Gifts to help us to keep following Jesus on our Pilgrimage of Faith.

So, Welcome for this Mass, and Welcome into this time of “Synodality” here in our Diocese, and throughout the Church. Let us now stand, and prepare ourselves to celebrate these Sacred Mysteries....

### **Homily:**

I think it’s safe to say that all of us here, in our heart of hearts, have day-dreamed about greatness, both for ourselves and for our loved ones---we want to be successful; perhaps to “make a name for ourselves”. That’s part of human nature, isn’t it? From our earliest days, when we’re constantly asked “what do you want to be when you grow up?”, we all want to “shoot for the stars”----we want to become someone famous, respected, admired.

So, we can’t really blame James and John for doing what they did, as we just heard in today’s Gospel reading; they obviously had rehearsed this as they

were all walking along the Road on the way to Jerusalem, when they came to Jesus and said: *“Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you.”* So Jesus, perhaps with a wry smile on His Face, said: *“What do you want me to do for you?”* Their request was as BIG as it could be: *“Grant that in Your Glory we may sit, one at your right and the other at your left.”* It became very obvious that they had not been paying attention to their Teacher Who, (as the verses immediately preceding these we just heard) had been painfully baring His soul to those same Apostles by telling them----for the third time----what was awaiting Him when they got to Jerusalem: that He would be arrested, tortured, humiliated along the Way of the Cross, Crucified and Buried.

James and John would go on to become two of the greatest of all the Apostles; but at that moment, they appeared to be self-serving and selfish young men, looking out only for themselves. They still had a lot of “listening” to Jesus to do! Jesus kept patiently teaching them---and all of us: *“Whoever wishes to be great among you (must) be the (servant) of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.”* In other words, if you want to be someone truly Great, you must eventually learn to Serve the needs of others in the example of Jesus, our Lord.

Today’s first reading from the Prophet Isaiah (53:10-11) links “service” with “suffering” or “sacrifice”. All true service comes at a cost, as everyone here who has family responsibilities knows all too well; at the very least we must sacrifice our own comfort and security so that we can care for the needs of our loved ones. As Isaiah describes the servant who suffers: *“The Lord was pleased to crush him in infirmity. If he gives his life as an offering for sin, he shall see his descendants in a long life, and the will of the Lord shall be accomplished through him.”* Along our Journey of Faith, we will have to undergo hardships and difficulties—at times it may feel like we are being *“crushed in infirmity.”* But, we are never alone in the suffering or in the hardships we endure when we are serving our brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus Himself is with us, especially in the Sacraments and through the pastoral care of the Church.

That’s what we heard in today’s Second reading from the Letter to the Hebrews: *“We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin.”* Everything we experience along our Journey of Faith thru this world—except sin—has already been experienced by the One who came *“to give his life as a ransom for many.”*

As I mentioned at the beginning of this morning's Mass, today marks a special day throughout the whole Church as we begin a worldwide Synod. The word Synod means "walking alongside one another" along the Journey. During the Mass celebrated by Pope Francis last Sunday in Rome when he opened the worldwide Synod, he said: "Celebrating a Synod means walking on the same road, walking together." "Synodality" can describe Jesus' style of proclaiming His Good News, and how He began spreading the Kingdom of God. He was constantly walking alongside people, listening to the questions and concerns of their hearts, and helping them to learn of God's Love. We don't just encounter Jesus here when we come to Church; He walks always by our side, accompanying us wherever we go.

And that's what Jesus was doing with James and John, and the rest of the Apostles; He used their self-serving, misguided request for "greatness" and their dream for power to teach them what true, and lasting greatness really is; to help them to refocus their Dream to be consistent with Jesus' Dream---which was far greater than they could ever realize. In fact, in today's Gospel, Jesus tells us that the path to greatness, which is what our synodal journey is all about, is more like a "service road" than an Interstate or Expressway. By accompanying our sisters and brothers along the way, by listening carefully to each other, and by responding as servant-leaders and caregivers to the needs of others---that's the way we can truly make a difference in this broken and troubled world.

It all comes down to how well we can "listen"; how open we are to allow Jesus' teachings to refocus our own "dreams" and ambitions into the "Spiritual Vision" Jesus came to share with us and all the world. Are we able to stop---reflect---and listen to what the Holy Spirit wants us to hear? Are we able to discern what directions the Holy Spirit wants to give us, individually, and to all of us, as the Church?

When we look around our world, it seems clear that most of us have lost the ability, or forgotten how, to "listen" to one another. There's very little dialogue, or give-and-take conversation; there's a lot of monologue, strong opinions shared through every venue of the electronic media, with no toleration for any differing opinions. In fact, it seems that we have come to the point that anyone with a different opinion is almost considered an enemy, or perhaps even seen as evil. I think everyone realizes that we can't continue with this kind of divisiveness and intolerance for one another; as a Society we need to find a way to recapture our commitment to work together and for the common good.

When Pope Francis asks the whole Church to focus for the next 6 or 7 months on “listening” to one another, and “listening” to the Holy Spirit, we may find ourselves wondering how do we do that? That’s where we need to open ourselves to the Holy Spirit’s inspiration---to “listen” to the Spirit’s direction---to ask for guidance, instead of continuing to keep doing what we’re doing. And that is true both in Society and in the Church.

We need to be able to “Dream” of a better way to be Church at this time in history. In his recent book, *Let Us Dream: The Path to a Better Future*, Pope Francis shared his dream for the Church: He wrote: *“I dream of a Church with a missionary option, capable of transforming everything, so that the Church’s customs, ways of doing things, times and schedules, language and structures, can be suitably channeled for the evangelization of today’s world rather than for her self-preservation.”* (EG. #27) In other words, the Holy Father is asking us to move away from a “maintenance mode” of doing things, summed up in the words: “We’ve always done it this way!”; and move toward a “missionary mode” of doing things---going outside our church walls, trying new ways to proclaim the Good News of God’s Kingdom to a world that clearly doesn’t know Jesus, but so desperately needs Him.

Are we able to dream of a better world? Are we able to hold onto “Hope” that we will get through this awful time of the worldwide pandemic and all the ill effects it has brought to us; are we able to trust that we can get through this time of social divisiveness, and recapture a sense of collective harmony and working for a common purpose? The Holy Spirit is the One to help us to “dream”---to see as God sees.

What do you think God’s Dream is? The same as it has been since the creation of Adam and Eve---that all people live together as one, in harmony, to treat one another with charity and justice, and eventually to live with Him forever in Heaven. Sin is what got in the way of God’s Original Dream. And sin is what gets in the way of our Dreams too.

James and John eventually got over their “Distorted Dream” for the positions of power and prestige, because they came to embrace Jesus’ Dream. They did that by continuing to accompany Jesus along the way, by remaining faithful to their calling, and by staying united with the rest of the Apostles, all of whom received the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost when they were totally transformed and went forth to begin the mission of the Church. They were among those who began to make that “dream” of God’s Kingdom on this earth begin to be realized. The Dream that the Holy Spirit helped to launch in the

hearts of those first Apostles is really Jesus' Dream/His Vision for the Future! He established His Church, and commissioned the Apostles when He said as He was ascending to Heaven: *"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Go therefore, make disciples of all nations, baptize them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.; teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always until the end of time."* (Mt.28:19f)

Jesus wants His church to be vibrant---active---mission-oriented. It's His vision for the Kingdom of God and His fervent wish that each of us—His disciples—will be joy-filled missionaries, and generous servants, who proclaim the Good News of Jesus by our very lives. The Holy Spirit is the one who in-spires us to share in this dream and to become our best selves for the sake of God's Kingdom.

By the Grace of God, this time of the Synod when we are asked to do more intensive "listening" to the Holy Spirit and to one another, corresponds to this special "Jubilee Year of the Holy Spirit" which we have proclaimed here in our Diocese. Having just celebrated our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as a Diocese, and as we are preparing for a time of transition of Leadership here in our Diocese as we anticipate our next Bishop, we set our sights on the future, praying to be spiritually renewed and re-energized so that we can be the Church here in the Diocese of Kalamazoo that we need to be.

Therefore we welcome this time of Synodality as an additional reason for us to be more intentional in opening ourselves to the Holy Spirit's guidance, inspiration and willingness to go where He leads us.

As we begin this journey together, let us ask the Holy Spirit to bless us. May we truly be a Diocesan Church that receives and lives the gifts of *communion, participation and mission*. May we be open to the voice of the Holy Spirit—taking to heart the dream of Pope Francis for a better future. As the Holy Father teaches: "Without the Spirit, there is no synod. And without prayerful listening and discernment of spirits, we cannot be the mission Church we are called to be as a result of our Baptism." By the grace of the Holy Spirit, may our Blessed Mother Mary, St. Augustine, our patron, and all the saints, walk with us on the journey we are beginning today!

*Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your Faithful and enkindle within us the Fire of Your Love!*