

“FINDING A WAY FORWARD TOGETHER”

ARCHDIOCESAN SYNOD PROCESS BEGINS

It is always a joy to attend wedding receptions, especially after working with couples for at least six-eight months prior to celebrating their Nuptial Mass. Last weekend, following the dinner and speeches, I strategically produced my laminated “Hall Pass” to those at my table. For priests who live by the adage, “Early to bed, early to rise,” a built-in excuse comes in handy on a weekend evening. To what do I refer? It was a decree from the **Council in Trullo**, named after the location of the meeting of 215 bishops, a domed (Gr: *troulos*) hall in Justinian II’s Imperial Palace, in present-day Istanbul. What did my “Hall Pass” say? “No one who is on the **priestly** catalogue nor any monk is allowed to take part in horse-races or to assist at theatrical representations. But if any **clergyman be called to a marriage**, as soon as the **games** begin let him **rise up and go out**, for so it is ordered by the doctrine of our fathers.” (Trullo– Canon XXIV) I certainly consider **dancing** to be “the games,” and gleefully invoke this “escape” clause on occasion, but always with a smile, of course.

Church Councils come in various forms: local, national, regional and even international, in the form of Ecumenical Councils. The branch of theology known as **ecclesiology** pays particularly close attention to these gatherings, the delineation of which is not always neat and clear. The Council of Trullo in 692 A.D. is a perfect example, as some scholars maintain that it should be considered an addendum to an earlier ecumenical Council, and not as a new local one. But that is a topic for another column. More to the point, the terms **synod** and **council** were essentially synonyms until modern times, up to Vatican II. They derive from Greek (*σύνδοκος*) or Latin (*consilium*), both of which mean “assembly”. Appropriately, synods and councils contribute to the **rich history** in the Church, both in the East and in the West. They teach us so much that is valuable about the concerns of Church leaders at various times throughout our history, even if attending horse races is no longer one of them!

The Greek word for Synod itself derives from two words, *σύν* meaning “together” and *ὁδός* “way” or “journey”. It is about **finding a way forward** and doing so **together** as the assembled People of God: bishop, lay faithful, religious and clergy together. As you have heard, we are embarking upon an Archdiocesan Synod, a process that will comprise the better part of **two years**. The structure for a diocesan Synod is contained in the Church’s Code of Canon Law. (Click [here](#) online) It reflects the many and varied voices and constituencies in a local Church and provides an opportunity for the Christian faithful to work collaboratively for the furtherance of the Gospel, attentive to the particular needs of that area. Those needs vary from diocese to diocese even within a country. Each diocese is part of the larger universal Church and each local church exists in communion with the Holy Father, and never apart from him.

A series of three **Plenary Councils of Baltimore** were held between 1852 and 1884, producing among other things, a **national system of catechesis** that served our country so well up to (and in some cases beyond) the Second Vatican Council. Known as the **Baltimore Catechism**, this national catechism systematized and standardized Catholic catechesis across the board. National Councils can deal with special issues, some of which may be unique to a particular country, but again, do so in communion with the universal Church. Our nation’s bishops were united in their approach and the Baltimore Councils carved out a specific plan to move forward, producing much fruit. It can happen at a local level as well.

But when **Cardinal Reinhold Marx** of Munich (head of the German bishops’ conference) announced the decision to move ahead and engage in a national “binding synodal path,” it caused alarm among many Catholics, both in Germany and far beyond. And rightly so! Why? It is because of the ecclesiological implications of a “binding” process, especially if that includes decisions contrary to received Church doctrine in areas of morality and sacraments, for example. The specter of such a national “binding” Synod in Germany has caused many to share the concern (including **the Pope himself** in a letter he sent to the Germans) that if their findings depart from the received teaching and practice of the Church, problems will inevitably follow. After reading the draft text, it is not a stretch to reach such a conclusion, though time will tell. But that is **not what is envisioned** in the Church for a Synod.

A Synod is intended to be a profound exercise of **ecclesial communion**. Typically, the decrees that emerge are of a more pastoral and practical nature, and not statements about Catholic doctrine, except insofar as to **implement the Church's teaching** on these matters in a more effective way on a local level. However, when Catholics read news reports such as these, they may, rightly or wrongly, infer something about a Synod or Council that is mistaken. I wish to dispel any misconceptions. By discussing our Archdiocesan Synod here and in future columns, I encourage your participation in the upcoming listening sessions. As I have repeatedly said and written, your voice is important for the future, both of this parish and this Archdiocese.

- Blessed are the sorrowful. We extend our **deepest sympathy** to the family of **Javier Sanmiguel**, husband and father of four, who tragically lost his life when emerging from his home to assist following a car accident. He died selflessly while trying to help others, and we mourn with his faith-filled family, who attend Mass here at the Cathedral. There has been a recent spike in violent incidents in St. Paul. The funeral Mass will be held here this week.
- Christianity is **not colonialism**. Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte will not participate in the 2021 celebration of the 500th anniversary of the proclamation of the Gospel in his own nation. Saying that Magellan “brought the cannon and the cross,” Duterte has repeatedly clashed with the Church. One bishop pushed back saying: “At some point, the faith that they had embraced was no longer alien to them. It had succeeded in taking root on the fertile ground of our innate spirituality as a people.”
- Rewarding bad behavior? The **New England Patriots** appear to be doing just that, offering up to \$30 million to former Oakland Raiders wide receiver Antonio Brown. He tried his level best to get kicked off his former team. While I can't blame him for wanting to play with a winning team, his behavior was reprehensible: needing to be physically separated from the team's General Manager, skipping practices, etc. And for all that, he will still receive **up to \$30 million**, signing less than 24 hours after he was released by a fed-up Oakland club.
- Be sure to stop by the **Museum** following today's 10:00 a.m. Mass to view our **new exhibit**. Based on the artistic history of the six Shrines of the Nations, it is dedicated to the immigrants in St. Paul and Minneapolis who contributed to the building of our Cathedral. Then join us for coffee and donuts.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel
Rector