

*Journeying Together:
Theological Foundations for Pastoral Planning*

The Church as the Family of God

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Living a synodal life begins with the Holy Trinity. In this article, I want to explore more deeply the roots of this “journeying together” as the Family of God, beginning with Christ and His Eucharistic Presence, then turning to the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary.

REMAINING CONNECTED TO CHRIST

Synodality is a way of living the faith in a permanent manner at every level in the life of the Church and is rooted in the Paschal Mystery beginning with baptism, through which individuals share in the communion of the Trinity. Baptism involves the human response to the call to live in union with Christ through the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 1:9). This communion purifies the person from sin, making him or her a new creation, an adopted child of God and member of the Church, opening the door to the other sacraments, including the Eucharist.

It is the Church which makes the Eucharist, just as the Eucharist makes the Church. In virtue of the Eucharist, the People of God as the Body of Christ journey together with diverse members (1 Cor. 10:17) under the headship of Christ. Christ, the Good Shepherd, leads the flock on its journey. He not only leads, but He also feeds the flock. In the reception of Holy Communion, communion with God is deepened vertically and horizontally. God’s own agape is received bodily, so that His saving work may continue in and through the Church. Conscious of the gift, the Church goes forth to draw all of humanity together in unity. A parish or Family of Parishes must remain intimately connected to Christ in the Eucharist, prioritizing Sunday Mass and access to the Eucharist.

POURING OUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

At the baptism of Christ, the voice of the Father was heard and the Holy Spirit descended over Him like a dove. This same Spirit, which was poured out on the apostles at Pentecost, has been poured into our hearts in baptism. The Holy Spirit introduces order (1 Cor. 12:1-20) amid the diversity of members and charisms in the Body of Christ so that members work together for the good of the whole Church (1 Cor. 12:14-31). Each member is given some manifestation of the Spirit in view of the good of the body. The gifts of the Spirit are gathered in the Church, where members serve and listen to one another reciprocally. The Church understands herself as a collective “we” in prayer, liturgy and discernment.

MARY, A MODEL FOR THE CHURCH

The Holy Spirit, who is at the core of this ecclesial “walking together,” also overshadowed Mary, Mother of the Church and the model of discipleship, who lived this journey in a privileged way. Although the Spirit was operating from the dawn of creation, in the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4) a qualitative leap was made in salvation history. By the Holy Spirit, Mary conceived the Word of God, who, in turn, was given as a gift to humanity. Mary and the Spirit “journey together” from the Annunciation through Pentecost.

If, in the economy of salvation, the Holy Spirit represents the condition of possibility for the self-communication of God in Jesus on the part of the Divine, then Mary, with her fiat, represents the condition of possibility of this communication on the part of humanity. Through her attentive listening and openness to God, she fulfilled her mission in bringing Christ to the world. She demonstrates the characteristics of living this journey. She journeyed with and in the Trinity, willingly receiving the love of the Father, bearing the Son within her womb, and becoming a temple of the Holy Spirit. The Mother of God is a model for all disciples and an icon of synodal life, reminding us of the universal call to listen attentively to God with an openness to the Holy Spirit.

Mary and the Holy Spirit will help guide us along the path of discernment. Therefore, let us entrust ourselves to them, concluding with a prayer to Christ from the Swiss mystic Adrienne von Speyr:

“Dear Lord, grant that we contemplate and affirm you and your Church, and carry out what our mission demands, in an ever-new spirit, in the spirit of your Mother’s consent. Grant also that we pray for this Spirit. We know you yourself are where you send your Spirit. The Spirit brought you to your Mother: the Spirit enabled her to carry you; and because in her you found again your own Spirit, you formed your Church. Since you have called us into this Church, make from each one of us a place where the Spirit of your Church blows, where the will of your Father is done together with you and with the help of the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

