



### PREACHING THE SYNOD

Not every homily needs to refer to the Synod, and a connection between the readings and liturgy to the synodal journey ought not to be forced. At the same time, the readings and prayers of the liturgy often reflect the three key elements of the Synod: Communion, Participation, and Mission. What follows are some “hints” or “prompts” that can help connect the readings and this synodal journey we are on....

- ❖ **Communion:** Emphasis our unity-in-diversity. Key messages include: “We are spread out across our entire diocese (and parish and world) but God unites us as one”; “The aim is not for all of us to be the same, but to walk forward together, sharing a common path and embracing our diversity”; “The communion that God builds in our midst is stronger than any divisions”; “Amidst our many differences, we are united in our common baptism, as members of the Body of Christ.”
- ❖ **Participation:** Throughout the synodal journey, efforts should also be made to include those who may sometimes be excluded, including members of other Christian denominations and other religions, people who experience poverty and marginalization, people who live with a handicap, young people, women, etc.
- ❖ **Mission:** The many gifts and charisms of the People of God in the parish and diocese can be emphasized. Key messages to convey are: “Every Christian has a vital role to play in the mission of the Church”; “All the baptized are living stones in building up the Body of Christ”; “No one is excluded from the joy of the Gospel”; “Lay people have a special mission in witnessing to the Gospel in all parts of human society”; “As disciples of Jesus, we are leaven in the midst of humanity so that the kingdom of God may rise across the entire world.”

Day	Readings	One way to connect to the Synod...
10/24/21 30 <sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time	Jer 31:7-9 Ps 126 Heb 5:1-6 Mk 10:46-52	Bartimaeus (Mk) lives on the margins, in exile; yet Jesus hears his voice... listens deeply to his needs... and responds. On this synodal journey, to whom are we being called to listen? Who are those we normally don't see or hear? How are we being called to respond, to cooperate with the God who does great things (Ps) and frees the exile (Jer)?
10/31/21 31 <sup>st</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time	Deut 6:2-6 Ps 18 Heb 7:23-28 Mk 12:28b-34	"Hear" (Dt)! Listen! That's what's at the heart of the synodal process. In Deut, Moses urges the people to listen to the heart of the law: Love God with your whole being. Jesus echoes those words (Mk), adding the text from Leviticus (19:18) to love our neighbor as our self. One way we love is to listen closely to one another. Perhaps, through synodal listening, we will discover the ways we are being called to love even more deeply.
11/7/21 32 <sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time	1 Kgs 17:10-16 Ps 146 Heb 9:24-28 Mk 12:38-44	The first reading and gospel both refer to a poor widow who gives all she has. While there are many ways to preach on these readings, perhaps one way to connect to the synodal process is to encourage our listeners – who may feel that they have nothing to offer on the journey, who may even be cynical about the what we're undertaking – to offer what "little" they think they have... remembering that the Spirit can take that seemingly small gift and multiply it greatly. Wisdom is found in the most hidden of places. Take part!
11/14/21 33 <sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time	Dn 12:1-3 Ps 16 Heb 10:11-14, 18 Mk 13:24-32	As we approach the end of the liturgical year, the readings take an eschatological turn—and so are more difficult to connect to the synodal path we are on. Perhaps we can find some solace in the psalm: if in the midst of tribulations, we are not abandoned, how much more might we have confidence that the Spirit travels with us on thus synodal journey!
11/21/21 Solemnity of Christ the King	Dn 7:13-14 Ps 93 Rv 1:5-8 Jn 18:33b-37	"King" is not a common—or comfortable—metaphor for us. We prize our personal freedom and sovereignty; nobody will tell us what to do! My body, my choice! A Synodal Church rejects such an approach to life: we are saved together, or not at all. This feast asks us: to whom are we ultimately accountable? To whom do we owe ultimate allegiance? Christ the King? If so, then the synodal journey invites us to explore together what such a commitment means here and now.

On November 28, we begin a new liturgical year – and a new liturgical season: **Advent**. Advent begins with an eschatological focus (first three Sundays) and then ends with intentional preparation for the nativity (fourth Sunday). We “prepare” for Christ’s return at the end of time as we “prepare” to remember his coming in time. The season is marked by a “devout and joyful expectation.” Might we approach our synodal participation with that same spirit?

Day	Readings	One way to connect to the Synod...
11/28/21 First Sunday of Advent	Jer 33:14-16 Ps 25 1 Thes 3:12-4:2 Lk 21:25-28, 34-36	Perhaps, for some, in the light of the “anxieties of life,” this synodal process might look like a waste of time. Or, for others, it fills them with fear: what will happen? How might the Church change? How will I be asked to change? Jesus tells us that neither approach is helpful. These are the times we live in. Be vigilant: watch, listen, for the movement of the Spirit. That’s what being a synodal Church is about. Paul prays that the Thessalonians would abound in love. As we undertake this synodal journey, may that be our prayer as well.
12/5/21 Second Sunday of Advent	Bar 5:1-9 Ps 126 Phil 1:4-6, 8-11 Lk 3:1-6	The prophet Baruch encourages us to take off our “robe of mourning” – to be filled with joy because of the great things God has done for us (Ps). Among these “great things” is calling us to baptism—a baptism which makes all of us co-responsible for the Church, partners for the gospel (Phil). That’s what synodality is all about. We journey together. Paul prays that the Church at Philippi might increase in love, and be a discerning people, that God might bring to completion the good work that God had begun in them. What a perfect prayer for a synodal Church! What a perfect prayer for us!
12/8/21 Immaculate Conception	Gn 3:9-15, 20 Ps 98 Eph 1:3-6, 11-12 Lk 1:26-38	Mary listened to the messenger, Gabriel. On this synodal journey we are invited to listen just as attentively, just as respectfully, to one another. Perhaps our neighbor, too, is bearing God’s word to us? Entrusting the Synodal Process to God, through the maternal intercession of Mary, Queen of the Apostles and Mother of the Church, we can make the words of the Handbook for the Synod our own: <i>May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Queen of the Apostles and Mother of the Church, intercede for us as we journey together on the path that God sets before us. As in the Upper Room at Pentecost, may her maternal care and intercession accompany us as we build up our communion with one another and carry out our mission in the world. With her, we say together as the People of God: “Let it be with me according to your word” (Luke 1:38).</i>
12/12/21 Third Sunday of Advent	Zep 3:14-18a Is 12:2-6 Phil 4:4-7 Lk 3:10-18	“Shout for joy” (Zep)! “Cry out with joy and gladness” (Resp). Rejoice always (Phil)! Should that not be the spirit that imbues our synodal journey? The Holy One (Is) journeys with us! Are we filled with expectation (Lk) for what might come from this journey? Are we hopeful? Or have we let hope and joy die in the flames of cynicism and fear?
12/19/21 Fourth Sunday of Advent	Mi 5:1-4a Ps 80 Heb 10:5-10 Lk 1:39-45	Bethlehem (Mi) is too small; but the Promised One will come from there. Mary is a pregnant teen; yet she makes a journey to her also-miraculously-pregnant relative (Lk). Two women— one unmarried and one known as barren. Not the expected bearers of divine favor. Who are those who we also push to the margins, prejudging them as unfit to “bear” the Lord to us? They are the ones we need to be “journeying with” so God’s word might be fulfilled.

The purpose of **Christmastime** is to remember “Christ’s birth and early manifestations.” Our task as preachers is not to treat these feasts simply as a recollection of past events, but as ongoing manifestations of Christ’s redemptive work for us. The synodal journey that we are on is one manifestation of Christ’s ongoing presence and work on our behalf. The Incarnation reminds us that God is present in the messiness of created stuff and daily life, in the messiness of parish life, a diocesan church, a synodal process. Yet, there is where we find Christ: in one another. And so the call, as we gather in synod, to listen to each other as we would to Christ: with deep respect and humility.

Day	Readings	One way to connect to the Synod...
12/25/21 Solemnity of the Nativity	Multiple sets of readings, depending on the Mass.	OK. Christmas really isn’t the right day to preach about the Synod... the feast itself ought to take precedence. <i>However...</i> this is also a day when many who don’t frequent our parishes <i>do</i> come to Mass... so it is the perfect time to extend an invitation to those who might feel like outsiders (like the Shepherd) or foreigners (like the Magi) to take part in the synodal process. But let’s do so in a way that’s welcoming, rather than subtly (or not so subtly) passes judgment on them!
12/26/21 Feast of the Holy Family	Sir 3:2-6,12-14 Ps 128 or 84 Col 3:12-17(21) OR 1 Jn 3:1-2, 21-24 Lk 2:41-52	The scandal, the mystery, of the Incarnation continues: God allowed God’s self to be part of a human family—with all the risk that entailed (such as getting separated, teens pushing boundaries, anxieties and broken hearts). Family life is filled with challenges; the question isn’t why we’re not more like some saccharine version of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph—the question is seeing our families, warts and all, as also being incarnational realities, loci of encounter with (and expressions of) the Divine. Therefore, why not explore the idea of family life as an example of synodality? We “journey with” each other; we are called to respectful listening (and not just children to their parents) as well as to bold speaking (not just parents to their children). Marriage is about <i>mutual</i> self-giving. Any one-sidedness in any of these relationships is toxic. Family life is messy, and God is in the mess. Just like this synodal journey we’re on.
1/2/22 Solemnity of the Epiphany	Is 60:1-6 Ps 72 Eph 3:2-3a, 5-6	The mystery of the incarnation continues to unfold. While in the readings for the Nativity Jesus was placed squarely in the history of Israel, as son of David and Abraham, the field of vision is now widened. Scandalous as it might be, the mystery of God’s love is made manifest for those outside of the Chosen People as well. If that’s the case, then as part of our synodal journey we need to seek out the “religious other” (“gentile”) to hear the wisdom they have to offer.
1/9/22 Baptism of the Lord	Is 42:1-4, 6-7 OR Is 40:1-5. 9-11 Ps 29 or 104 Acts 10:34-38 OR Ti 2:11-14; 3:4-7 Lk 3:15-16, 21-22	This feast day offers the opportunity to reflect on our baptisms. Through Baptism (an unmerited gift; see Ti), we are made part of the Body of Christ (unity) and are given the gift of the Holy Spirit (diversity). As such, we have both the right AND the responsibility to participate in the life and mission of the Church—including this synodal process that we’ve undertaken. No one ought to be excluded. At the same time, scandalous as it might be, the mystery of God’s love is made manifest for those we consider outsiders. They, too, ought to have a place on our synodal journey. God’s justice (Is) requires nothing less. God shows no partiality (Acts).

We enter again into **Ordinary Time**. During Year C, we hear the Gospel according to Luke proclaimed. This gospel privileges the marginalized, the outsider; and stresses the compassion of God. Are we doing the same on our synodal journey?

Sunday	Readings	One way to connect to the Synod...
1/16/22 2 <sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time	Is 62:1-5 Ps 96 1 Cor 12:4-11 Jn 2:1-11	Through this synodal journey, God is doing something new. We are all called to generously share the gifts we have been given, and gratefully welcome the gifts of the other (1 Cor); that is the nature of a synodal Church. Perhaps, through this process, what is feeling “forsaken” and “desolate” (Is) now will bear new fruit. Perhaps the best wine is yet to come (Jn).
1/23/22 3 <sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time	Neh 8:2-4a,5-6,8-10 Ps 19 1 Cor 12:12-30 Lk 1:1-4, 4:14-21	This is also the Sunday of the Word of God. How appropriate, then, that the psalm response is: “Your word, Lord, are Spirit and life.” A synodal Church is a listening Church. And, yes, that means listening to the Spirit (Lk) at work in each of us, to each part of the Body (1 Cor) for no part is unimportant. It also means, listening together to the word of God (the Scriptures) and the Word of God (Christ).
1/30/22 4 <sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time	Jer 1:4-5, 17-19 Ps 71 1 Cor 12:31-13:13 Lk 4:21-30	Paul tells us that the greatest spiritual gift is love (1 Cor). If we are to be a synodal Church, then all our interactions ought to be marked by love as Paul described it: patient, kind, rejoicing in the truth. A synodal Church is not jealous, pompous, inflated, rude, self-interested (or, as Pope Francis might put it, self-referential), or quick-tempered; it does not brood over injury or rejoice over wrongdoing. How are our synodal conversations going? What attitudes mark those conversations? Are we welcoming, even to those who might have challenging words for us (Lk), or do we try to throw them off a cliff?
2/6/22 5 <sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time	Is 6:1-2a, 3-8 Ps 138 1 Cor 15:1-11 Lk 5-11	Only God is Holy. Isaiah cries out that he is “a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips.” Peter confesses: “I am a sinful man.” If we are honest, we ought to make these words our own: we sin. What passes our lips isn’t always edifying! Perhaps in our synodal conversations we have heard—or said—harsh words; hurtful words. Hopefully, we have sought—and given—forgiveness as needed. But that’s the messiness of a synodal Church, a Church made up of human beings. It can be no other way. Yet, God still calls: “Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?” Do we answer, as Isaiah did: “Here I am,” I said; “send me!”
2/13/22 6 <sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time	Jer 17:5-8 Ps 1 1 Cor 15:12, 16-20 Lk 6:17, 20-26	To undertake this synodal journey is an act of hope, of trust—in the faithful God who journeys with us (Jer, Ps). While we have also needed to trust in each other, in order to both listen humbly and speak boldly, our ultimate trust has been (hopefully) in the Spirit. The Lukan beatitudes remind us to look for those who are blessed (Spirit-filled) in unexpected places: the poor, the hungry, the sorrowful, the hated. Have we sought their voices during this synodal process? Or have we paid more attention to the rich, powerful, scornful, and popular?

<p>2/20/22 7<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time</p>	<p>1 Sm 26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23 Ps 103 1 Cor 15:45-49 Lk 6:27-38</p>	<p>As our listening sessions begin to draw to a close, perhaps we need to reflect on the conversations that have taken place – and, in light of the gospel, perhaps confess that our listening has not always been humble and our speaking not always gracious. Has someone been hurt in the process? What healing and mercy do they need? What of the one who has done the hurting? What healing and mercy do they need? How have we judged one another? Whom have we run through with the spear of our words, or dared to call enemy instead of sister or brother (cf. 1 Sm)? What do we need to let go of?</p>
<p>2/27/22 8<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time</p>	<p>Sir 27:4-7 Ps 92 1 Cor 15:54-58 Lk 6:39-45</p>	<p>By now, our formal listening sessions are drawing to a close. We have done a lot of speaking and listening. By doing so, we've made ourselves vulnerable. As Sirach tells us: "When a sieve is shaken, the husks appear; so do one's faults when one speaks." Hopefully, then, we have become more attentive to removing the planks from our own eyes than the splinter in the eyes of others (Lk). As this portion of our journey draws to a close, we hope and pray that the process we have undertaken will bear good fruit. If we have listened and spoken out of the goodness of our hearts, we are promised that it will (Lk).</p>