

My mom makes a point of reminding me, yearly, on my birthday, what day of the week I was born, what time of day, but especially how many hours she labored to give me birth!

We remember the specifics of special occasions, like in today's gospel: when and where God spoke to John, son of Zechariah, and how he responded by preaching and baptizing.

No doubt we'll remember the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic on 16 March 2020, and the Derecho on 6 August 2020, and on 6 January 2021, the failed insurrection.

Maybe we'll also remember 17 October 2021, when Pope Francis invited us to listen to God, and to listen to what each other says they heard, and together determine the way forward.

That's the process of synodality, which we'll practice by asking anyone and everyone for input on what questions to ask, criteria to use, and standards to measure parish vitality.

And then we'll put that into practice in order to determine which parishes to close, merge, or leave as is, as well as how to provide them with pastoral leadership, priest or no priest.

The hope is that it will result in an arrangement of parishes, and a way of ministering to them that will conform to what Jesus wants his Church to be, and what people need it to be.

And what is that? What people need is for a parish to be welcoming, inclusive, where they can develop quality relationships, and can find answers to life's big questions.

What Jesus wants is for his Church to be known for helping the poor, learning and teaching the Gospel, and gathering people for daily prayer and Sunday worship at Holy Mass.

Size isn't the only, or even the best measure of parish vitality. You could have a large parish concerned mostly with providing convenient times to go to Mass; not a parish, really.

We can make 17 October 2021 memorable by responding to the invitation to listen to God and to each other to secure the future of our parishes, and provide them with leadership.

I hope everyone participates in this process. As they say, we don't have a right to complain if we don't speak up. And if we don't step up, we might end up without a parish in our area.