



February 6, 2022

Fifth Sunday of Ordinary Time

"Here I am," I said; "send me."—Isaiah 6:8



Dear Friends;

In our first Reading Isaiah has an ecstatic vision. The Lord of Hosts appears filling the temple. The Seraphim cry out acclaiming the glory of God. The great door shakes. And Isaiah is overcome with his smallness before the glory of God. He cries out, *"Woe is me, I am doomed! For I am a man of unclean lips, living among a people of unclean lips."* Peter has a similar reaction at the surprising catch of fish that Jesus had them make. Peter cries out, *"Depart from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man."*

If we are honest we can all make the words of Isaiah and Peter our own. We all sin and only God is Holy. What passes our lips is not always holy and uplifting. We can be harsh and hurtful with our words. Hopefully we have sought out—and given—forgiveness. Yet despite our sinful nature God still calls us to the vision of the Kingdom. Isaiah realizes that though he is sinful, *"my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"* And Jesus assures Peter that instead of fish he will be *"catching people"* for the Kingdom. Despite our human weakness God calls us all. Like Isaiah let us respond, *"Here I am, send me."*

Over the last several weeks you have been hearing a new word in the Prayer of the Faithful—**synodality** (pronounced *sino-dal-ity*). And you will be hearing more of it over the next few years. Pope Francis defines synodality as *"walking together."* He wants us to engage others especially those on the margins. He wants us as Church to listen to each other, the needs of our world, and the Holy Spirit. A Church that operates under the model of synod is going to look and act very differently.

Francis is doing this for two important reasons. The first is to continue the reforms of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). The Council called us back to the centrality of Scripture and the model of the early Church. The Council returned us to a Scriptural understanding of the Church as the whole *"people of God."* Baptism is the foundational sacrament that calls us to be active members of the body of Christ.

The Council began the reforms with the liturgy. They moved us from a clergy-centered rite to one that calls the whole assembly to be engaged. That means the assembly moves from being passive spectators to active participants. The liturgy calls us to express our common life. What is true of the liturgy is the same of the whole Church. The call to be a synodal Church recognizes that all together lay and ordained have responsibility to share the Good News with everyone.

The second reason is Francis wants us to be a Church that *"walks together"* is to overcome the sickness of clericalism that infects the system. Ordained ministry was a way to recognize public leadership in the community. Problems arose when that public recognition was seen to be the conferral of sacred power so that the ordained are seen to be a new type of being and separate caste.

Clericalism is to see oneself as belonging to an exclusive rank. Membership is restricted and it operates out of a rigid hierarchy. It is closed and secretive. It becomes a system of privilege, deference and power. Members maintain their status at all costs. Members require that others are accountable to them; but they are accountable to no one. The pedophilia scandal and its cover-up reveal the sinful failure of such a system. The path of synodality seeks to correct these sins.

The theme of the Synod on Synodality is "For a Synodal Church—Communion, Participation, Mission." The synod seeks to empower all to be active members of the Church. We begin with engaging and listening to a wide range of people. We in the Diocese of Oakland are commencing this process. The bishop invites all to participate. Soon we will be scheduling listening session(s) so that we have the opportunity to exercise our role as the baptized and guide the bishops in their deliberations. To read more on the Synod you can contact the diocesan website www.oakdiocese.org/synod or the site for Voice of the Faithful, www.votf.org/2023Synod.

Peace!

Fr Ron

Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: www.anne.church