



November 5, 2023

31st Sunday of Ordinary Time

"The greatest among you must be your servant." Matthew 23:11



Dear Friends;

I have been streaming the series, New Amsterdam. It is about a public hospital that by its charter must take care of everyone who comes, whether they can pay or have insurance. It begins when a brilliant and charming new hospital administrator, Dr Max Goodwin is hired. He is set on tearing down bureaucracies to provide exceptional care for the patients. The doctors and staff are not so sure. They have heard this kind of idealism before. But in all his interactions Dr Max returns to the question, *"How can I help?"*

I believe that this is the very question that bishops and priests should be asking. Every human organization can become cumbersome, archaic, and bureaucratic. The church is no different. We need to periodically purge those things that keep us from our mission to change the world. This is what the Synod on Synodality is all about. How can we help? Jesus tells us to become servants of our sisters and brothers.

Last week all the priests working in the diocese were required to attend a meeting concerning rules that the bishop wants enforced, and the bankruptcy process. Control was the theme: who can become a godparent or sponsor, when children should be baptized, only the bishop is the normal minister of confirmation, no communion services, no lay preaching, etc. Then, we had to suffer through a report on the bankruptcy. It was not a life-giving moment.

Many (especially bishops, priests, and EWTN) want us to return to a rules-based Catholicism. They want a church that they can control. The irony is that was the kind of church that gave us the culture of abuse, secrets, and cover-ups. People were told to be quiet, pay, pray, obey. The very thing that has led the Diocese to bankruptcy.

Recently, Pope Francis made a statement during the Synod. He told the Synod members they should respect and honor the faith of all the baptized who continue to believe even when their pastors act like dictators. *"When ministers overstep in their service and mistreat the people of God, they disfigure the face of the church with chauvinistic and dictatorial attitudes."* He went on to say, *"Clericalism is a whip, it is a scourge, it is a form of worldliness that defiles and damages the face of the Lord's bride,"* the church.

Pope Francis speaks of the church not as a bureaucracy but a relationship. *"I like to think of the church as the simple and humble people who walk in the presence of the Lord—the faithful people of God."* Drawing on the teachings of the Second Vatican Council he states, *"One of the characteristics of this faithful people is its infallibility—yes, it is infallible in credendo"* (in belief).

What angers Jesus with the religious leadership of his time is they use their power to control others. They disempower them. They rob them of their voice. All this so they can serve themselves. One of the reflections at the Synod calls us to recognize that all the baptized have an authority. All are baptized into Christ who was anointed: priest, prophet, and king. We share in that anointing.

The First letter of John best describes the infallibility in believing, *sensus fidei*. *"You have been anointed by the Holy One, and all of you have knowledge," "the anointing that you have received from Christ abides in you, and so you do not need anyone to teach you," "his anointing teaches you about all things."* (1 John 2:20, 27) In other words never let your voice be silenced, even if by a priest or bishop.

Peace,

Fr Ron

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