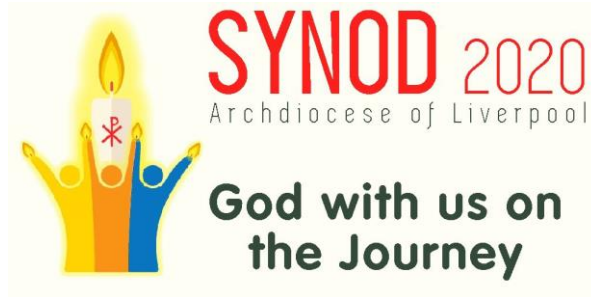


REFLECTING ON THE SYNOD RECOMMENDATIONS (15)



Communications and Media

Go Tell It on the Mountain

If you think about it, the work of the Church is all about communication. When Jesus met with his disciples at the end of his ministry, what did he tell them? "Go and tell the nations about what I have taught you," he said in Matthew 28. "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news," he told them in Mark 16. "Repentance and forgiveness of sins it to be proclaimed...to all nations," he taught them in Luke 24. "Tell the nations," "proclaim the good news," "to all the nations." It sounds like a job for the communications department. Even the very word: communication summons in our Catholic minds another phrase, one which we love and keep sacred: Holy Communion. To communicate is to enter into communion with others, into a sacred connection of love. Indeed, the official mission statement of the Archdiocese of Liverpool reflects this perfectly: "Taking to heart the last words of the Lord Jesus, we will go into the world to proclaim the Good News to the whole of creation." Jesus does indeed send us to "go tell it on the mountain." These days, however, we have the beautiful tools of technology to serve this mission.

Good and evil

The trouble is, like everything else, we can use the internet for both good and evil. The recent encyclical entitled in Latin, *Fratelli Tutti*, and in English, *Brothers and Sisters All*, says in this paraphrase of article 43 that it's easy to use the internet for dark purposes.

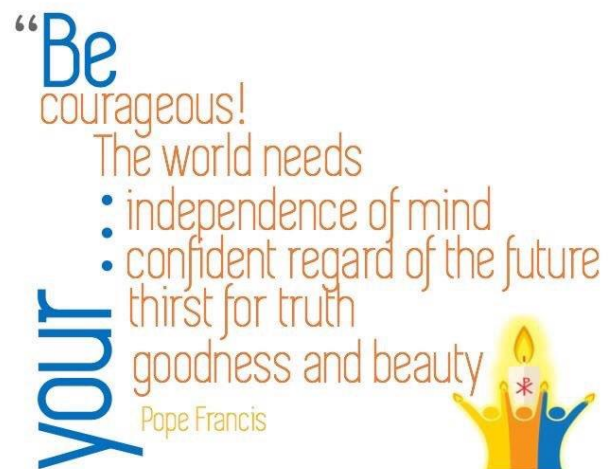
"Entire campaigns of hatred are conducted online. Some people see online groups as a form of mutual support, but in fact, they are mainly 'enclaves of the like-minded,' all focused on a single perceived enemy. As helpful as they are, digital connections cannot build authentic and loving unity. Social aggression has grown exponentially online. Crude, hateful, and violent things are said in this quasi-public forum now, things which until now would have risked the loss of respect. Even some political figures do this. This online hate speech forms networks of fanatics resulting in defamation and slander. How does this contribute to the welfare of the human family?"

All of this points to a great need on our part to create trusted and holy online opportunities for our people—and because of its nature—people from around the world to share communion about the Good News. An online ministry must be well-planned and carefully

constructed, with authentic and accessible material and ways for people to encounter both each other and Jesus.

All that we said in these reflections so far about formation, teaching, and outreach, about welcome and inclusivity, about shared ministry and evangelisation, about reaching young people and young adults, about extending the reach of our schools into our homes, about the love of neighbours far and wide, about sharing in a movement for creation care, about being a witness of Jesus' love to the world, they all depend on getting our use of media and communications figured out and well-orchestrated. As we said at the beginning of this reflection, communication is what we're all about as the Church. Go, tell it on the mountain, indeed!

REFLECTING ON THE SYNOD RECOMMENDATIONS (16)



Governance and Synodality

Safeguarding

In this entire discussion about how we administer and govern the Church, we place the safeguarding of vulnerable children and adults at the top of our priorities. Our failure to safeguard in the past has taught us a painful lesson. Without proper safeguarding, many people—mostly children—suffer great emotional harm and our entire witness to justice, love, and mercy is damaged. Our commitment to the safety and welfare of the vulnerable is uncompromised and robust.

Synodality

We in the Church are not set side-by-side collectively but we are bound together by the shared, inner presence of the Holy Spirit. The unity we have in the Spirit and the faith which God gives to each of us is what a Synod such as this one celebrates. We listen to one another, discerning God's invitation and we trust that God's desires for us are revealed in this synodal process. "A synodal Church is a Church which listens," Pope Francis reminded us in October 2015. We must realise, he said, "that listening "is more than simply hearing. It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn." It's the faithful people and their bishops all listening to each other, and all listening to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth (John 14:17), which allows us to

discern what the Spirit calls us to be. Because of this powerful movement of the Spirit among us, we remain firmly committed to decision-making which is transparent and collaborative. We are synodal people! As Pope Francis reminded us: "It is the path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium."

The role and place of women

We said earlier in these reflections that, for many years, lay people were primarily bystanders in the Church, observing her from something of a distance, and being more a spectator at liturgy than an actual participant. Ours was a clerically dominated institution and the Church gave very few serious roles to lay people. This has been especially true of women in the Church. Church leaders did not allow women to hold ministerial office and we rarely saw a woman in the sanctuary until very recent times except to care for altar linens or other housekeeping duties.

In the early Church, women played vital roles in the life of Christ and were the first to meet him after the resurrection. It was women who financed Jesus' entire ministry as we see in the first three verses of chapter 8 in Luke's Gospel: "Soon afterwards [Jesus] went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him as well as some women whom he had cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary called Magdalene... and Joanna... Chuza and Susanna, and many others, who supported Jesus' work out of their resources." In the original Greek of the Gospel, the term used here to indicate the support of these women is *διηκόνουν* from which we get the English word: deacon and that pretty much speaks for itself.

St Paul speaks generously about all the women ministers who served alongside him. The Letter to the Romans chapter 16: 1-6 which, unfortunately, is not in our cycle of Sunday readings which means we never hear it proclaimed, says this, for example: "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the Church at Cenchreae, that you may receive her in the Lord as befits the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a helper of many and myself as well. Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I but also all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks; also, greet the Church which meets in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ. Greet Mary, who has worked hard among you." Paul considered women partners in ministry in the early and unfolding years of the Church.

Indeed, Pope Benedict reflected on this in February 2007 in a speech which echoes Paul's sentiments: "Nor was the female presence in the sphere of the early Church in any way secondary..." Pope Benedict said, "It is to St Paul that we are indebted for a more ample documentation on the dignity and ecclesial role of women. He begins with the fundamental principle according to which for the baptised, *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither*

male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3: 28, italics added).

Likewise, *The Joy of the Gospel* endorses the idea which our Synod has embraced so strongly: "We need to create still broader opportunities for a more incisive female presence in the Church. Because the feminine genius is needed in all expressions in the life of society, we must guarantee the presence of women...in the various settings where we make important decisions both in the Church and social structures."

The parish

We began this reflection with a strong statement about our commitment to safeguarding, our commitment to synodality, and our commitment to creating a way for women and men to become equal partners in the Church's ministry. These are all significant efforts, but we embrace them nonetheless.

Beyond that, it is the parish that is the fundamental place with gathers up all the local households and families into a community of love and worship. The parish, indeed, is a community of communities! Let's take a more in-depth look at what makes up a parish by considering what Pope Francis teaches about it in this paraphrase of *The Joy of the Gospel* #28.

"The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and missionary creativity of the pastor and the community... If the parish proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be "the Church living amid the homes of her sons and daughters." We presume that the parish is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed group made up of a chosen few... It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink during their journey..."

So, there it is. A parish is much more than the place where Mass is said. It's much more than a building in the neighbourhood. It's much more than a venue for funerals, weddings, and baptisms. Those things are essential, but to succeed a parish must support "the homes of her sons and daughters." This teaching of Pope Francis forces us to examine carefully what the Synod asked: How can deacons and lay people provide leadership? How can each parish create a pastoral plan aimed at supporting the households? How can each keep a reliable record of all its members and even its hangers-on? How can we develop working, effective parish councils which give lay people a share in the responsibility for parish life? How can the parish become more transparent in terms of decision-making and finances? And how can the parish welcome as leaders people of varying genders, backgrounds, and races?

Big questions, these. Let's get going!

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