



## PREACHING THE SYNOD, PART 2

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.”

**Lent** begins on Ash Wednesday: March 2 this year. One way to imagine Lent is as a journey to the font, to the Easter Sacraments. The Elect are making this journey for the first time. For the faithful, this is an annual pilgrimage back to the font to renew our baptismal promises—repenting of those times we have failed to do so. While our fasting, almsgiving, and prayer help in our own conversion—the deepening of how we live our baptismal calling—these traditional Lenten works are also how we accompany and support the Elect during this Period of Purification and Enlightenment. The Elect do not journey alone, and neither do we. Conversion takes place in community. But the font isn’t an end in itself. Participating in this Lenten journey together, we are ready to be missioned from the font at Easter to share the Good News of the Resurrection.

Day	Readings	One way to connect to the Synod...
3/6/22 1 <sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent	Deut 26:4-10 Ps 91 Rom 10:8-13 Lk 4:1-13	<p>“My father was a wandering Aramean...” (Deut). As Christians, we are part of a people on a journey. The catechumens have been journeying alongside us; today, at the Rite of Election, they will be called to take those final steps to the font... from which they will be sent to share in the mission of the Church. The journey will still go on! But it is not a journey for the faint of heart; temptations to turn aside abound (Lk)! Yet, we can find solace in the fact that we do not journey alone. We are accompanied and supported by each other (including through the Lenten works of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving), without distinction (Rom). And we are accompanied by the Lord, our refuge and fortress (Ps).</p> <p>The temptation of Jesus for 40 days is meant to recapitulate another story of wandering: the experience of Israel in the desert for 40 years. The synodal process may even feel more like wandering, than a purposeful journey to a fixed destination. And perhaps it should; we are on a journey of discovery together. And on that journey, just like Jesus/Israel, we will experience temptations along the way. Both were tempted by hunger, to put God to the test, and idolatry. How are we tempted now in ways that are distractions from the Synod and from God? Name those temptations in your lives, and rebuke them just as Jesus rebuked his tempter.</p> <p>If the Rite of Sending (RCIA #106-117; 434-445; 530-546) is celebrated on this Sunday, the preacher might speak of being sent and being chosen, as was Abraham and his descendants. The prayer that closes the intercessions asks that guide and strengthen the catechumens (and candidates) during this journey, and so be built into the kingdom of Christ.</p>
3/13/22 2 <sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Lent	Gen 15:5-12, 17-18 Ps 27 Phil 3:17-4:1 Lk 9:28b-36	<p>While Lent prompts us to introspection, we do well to remember that faith implies community, and communion. While we are saved as individuals (Ps, Phil), we are not saved in isolation— but as a people in covenant with God (Gen). The story of the Transfiguration (Lk) highlights the importance of listening as a synodal Church. First, we are called to listen—as the Father says—to the Son. But note also that the listening takes place in community: there are three disciples on Mt. Tabor! That’s what discernment is all about. Finally, we are also called to listen to each other – even if it seems we don’t know what we’re saying!</p> <p>The RCIA allows for the celebration of a Scrutiny-like penitential rite for the Candidates for full communion (RCIA #459-472). The prayers stress freedom from obstacles and falsehoods, and the healing of the wounds of sin, so that the candidates can walk the path of holiness, be fearless witnesses of the Gospel, and be one with the whole Church in a communion of love: participation, mission, communion.</p>

Day	Readings	One way to connect to the Synod...
3/20/22 3 <sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Lent	CYCLE A (SCRUTINIES) Ex 17:3-7 Ps 95 Rom 5 :1-2, 5-8 Jn 4 :5-42	<p>The story of the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn) demonstrates synodality at its finest. Jesus meets the woman where she is normally found; attending to normally, day-to-day needs. He doesn't set up camp at the Temple or a synagogue and expect her to come to him. They engage in dialogue; he listens to her and accompanies her – thirsty (as the Preface for this Sunday says) for her faith. She leaves from the encounter changed, and shares the good news with her community. The wider community is also changed—not just the Samaritan village, but the disciples: their eyes and hearts are opened to what can happen when those typically excluded (even despised) are met with openness and respect, and invited into the journey. The Church, if you will, became more open. The emphasis ought NOT to be placed on her marital history, but on her as an example of walking the synodal path. The Synod challenges us to cross boundaries, to listen humbly to everyone. Are there people we despise? Are there people who despise us? The homilist can encourage us to search our hearts and be honest with ourselves... and then do what Jesus did.</p> <p>The emphasis on life-giving water in the readings and prayers also offers a way to connect synodal participation to baptism. As the baptized, we are brought into the communion of the Church (and of the Trinity), called to participate in the life of the community (and of the Trinity), and to share in the Church's mission (to proclaim Christ in the power of the Spirit to the glory of the Father).</p> <p>The Scrutinies are meant to uncover and heal what is sinful and strengthen what is good in the Elect (see RCIA #141-146). Might not the synodal dialogues do the same for the Church? Are we not about naming what brings us joy and hope as we consider the Church, what encounters we have had where we have felt heard and welcomed? Are we not also about naming those times that encounters with the Church and the Church's ministers have broken our hearts; naming those ways that we, as Church, need the grace of conversion? The prayers of the First Scrutiny (RCIA #150-156) speak of honestly naming one's sins in order to be healed. So, too, in the synodal process must we name the times we have failed to truly listen to one another—and so be healed, so become more and more the synodal Church God is calling us to be.</p>
	CYCLE C Ex 3:1-8a, 13-15 Ps 103 1 Cor 10:1-6, 10-12 Lk 13:1-9	<p>The account of the fig tree (Lk) offers a cautionary tale for this synodal journey. The owner of the orchard saw no fruit, so he wanted to cut the tree down. The gardener cautioned patience, and loving attention, instead. So, too, with the synod. It is tempting to want to reap immediate fruit, to see dramatic change. But perhaps what is needed most is patience, and loving attention to the process—which is ongoing, even after these listening sessions are over. Then, we may very well be blessed with abundant fruit.</p>

Day	Readings	One way to connect to the Synod...
3/27/22 4 <sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent	CYCLE A (SCRUTINIES) 1 Sam 16:1b, 6-7, 10-13a Ps 23 Eph 5:8-14 Jn 9:1-41	<p>An ancient term for baptism is “enlightenment” (the Prayer after Communion broadens this sentiment, stating that God “enlighten[s] <i>everyone</i> who comes into this world” – a reason why we invite all persons to walk the synodal path with us, no matter their faith commitment). Preachers ought to keep in mind, however, that it’s not a term we’re used to – and to take care to avoid confusing it with the European Enlightenment of later history.</p> <p>The readings all refer to seeing rightly. During this synodal journey we’ve been talking, we’ve been asked to look at the Church with eyes wide open, and then name honestly and boldly what we see. At the same time, we need to acknowledge that our vision of the Church might be clouded by ideology, or by the desire to push an agenda or jockey for power. That is, to see not as God sees but as people see (1 Sam). Instead, like the man born blind, to see rightly we must have our eyes opened by Christ (Jn)—and become more and more children of light (Eph).</p> <p>One trap to avoid is setting up the Jewish leadership, or—God forbid—Judaism in general, as “anti-synodal.” Instead, their example as stock characters in the story can be used to point not to any supposed Jewish shortcomings but to OUR own blindness, OUR own inability to listen to those whom we are used pushing to the margins.</p> <p>The prayers of the Second Scrutiny (RCIA #164-170) pray that the Elect be freed from the “false values” that can blind them, that they may see what is true in the light of love. That is an appropriate prayer for all who walk the synodal path.</p>
	CYCLE C Joshua 5:9a, 10-12 Ps 34 2 Cor 5:17-12 Lk 15:1-3, 11-32	<p>The story of the prodigal son (Lk) offers another window into synodal attitudes. During this journey, how have we been like the father—running out to meet those who haven’t been at “home” in the Church, and welcoming them back with open arms, eager to hear their stories? How have we been like the older sibling, refusing to take part? Do we prefer a “pure” church filled only with versions of the older brother... complacent in their self-righteousness... or do we prefer to feast with the father? What conversion is this Lenten season still calling from us? Jesus’ original listeners would’ve been shocked by the actions ascribed to the father in the story. In what ways have we been shocked or surprised by the Synod to date—positively as well as negatively?</p>

Day	Readings	One way to connect to the Synod...
<p>4/3/22 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent</p>	<p>CYCLE A (SCRUTINIES) Ez 37:12-14 Ps 130 Rom 8:8-11 Jn 11:1-45</p>	<p>There were (and still are) those who reject the whole idea of the synod; who, like Martha in today's gospel, worry that there "would be a stench" if, in this case, the stones of hierarchy, privilege, exclusion, and complacency were rolled away. Yet, Jesus bids us to do just that: take away the stone! Untie those we've bound up and treated as though dead, as barred from the community! The synodal path leads to new life—for us as individual believers and for the Church—not because of anything within our power but because that is the path that the Father has called us to walk.</p> <p>In the gospel account, Jesus weeps. Exegetes debate: was it because of the lack faith he encountered, or, as the Preface for today's Mass mentions, was his grief over Lazarus' death the cause for his tears? Perhaps there is no single reason. In a synodal spirit, we might ask: what causes our tears when we reflect on our encounters within the Church? What breaks our hearts? And what gives us hope for new life in Christ and in the Spirit (cf. Ez, Rom)?</p> <p>The prayers of the Third Scrutiny (RCIA# 171-177) refer to the Elect being freed from the "realm" or "tyranny" of death so they can share in the mission of the Church – "bearing witness to their new life in Christ" and to God's glory by their faith, hope, and love.</p>
	<p>CYCLE C Is 43:16-21 Ps 126 Phil 3:8-14 Jn 8:1-11</p>	<p>In the reading from John's gospel, Jesus cautions those ready to condemn the woman (and who conveniently ignored her male partner) caught in adultery that they, too, are not sinless. On his part, he refuses to condemn the woman but calls her to ongoing conversion. Maybe this sounds a bit like the synodal journey we've been on. We've heard one another's stories—stories of joy and, truth be told, stories that broke our hearts. Stories recounting when the Church—as an institution, through its ministers, or through all of us who sit in the pews—was less than welcoming, did not listen, sought to exclude, or spoke words of condemnation and threw stones at those seeking bread.</p> <p>We need to learn from these stories, but not get mired down in the past (cf. Is, Phil). Instead, we are invited to rejoice that God is "doing something new" (Is) through the synod, invited to strain "forward to what lies ahead" (Phil). Together, then, we can cry out: "The Lord has done great things for us, we are filled with joy" (Ps).</p>

Day	Readings	One way to connect to the Synod...
<p>4/10/22 Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord</p>	<p>PROCESSION: Lk 19:28-40</p> <p>MASS: Is 50:4-7 Ps 22 Phil 2:6-11 Lk 22:14-23:56</p>	<p>A good general rule to follow is the more important the feast, the shorter the homily: the texts and ritual actions, in many ways, speak for themselves. On this Sunday, the theme of journey stands out: Jesus journeys to Jerusalem, and he journeys to the Cross. There is celebration, and there is heartbreak. Does that not also speak of the reality of the synodal journey that we've been on, the stories that we've been privileged to hear? What are the joys, and the sorrows, that have been shared with us? How are these stories challenging us as Church?</p> <p>Whom have we met along the way? On this synodal journey, perhaps we've felt betrayed by our own Judases or Peters, perhaps companions that we had hoped would journey with us have grown fatigued and fallen asleep—leaving us alone. But, we have not been abandoned (Ps). I imagine, to one extent or another, we've had a Simon to help carry the crosses we've found along the way. We've met those, like the women of Jerusalem, who shared their tears with us. We've been encouraged by those who stayed the course, like the women at the cross. And, when this synodal path has seemed most difficult—either because of the stories we've been privileged to hear, or the story that we've been burdened to tell, or because of the lack of support we've encountered—perhaps we've also been blessed by our own Joseph of Arimathea and Galilean women to minister to us, armed not with burial linens, spices and perfumed oils, but with their own compassion, and their listening hearts.</p>

The **Paschal Triduum** is who we are. On this, the heart of the liturgical year, homilies ought to be brief; the feasts speak for themselves. If the preacher wants to make some connection to the synodal journey that we are on, perhaps one way to do so would be to stress one of the themes of the synod that is best reflected by the feast—as illustrated below.

Day	Readings	One way to connect to the Synod...
4/14/22 Holy Thursday	Ex 12:1-8, 11-14 Ps 116 1 Cor 11:23-26 Jn 13:1-15	<p>Mission. The account of the footwashing is a commissioning (note the word!) to all of us: we are to follow the example of Jesus who came to serve and not be served. Our commissioning comes through the waters of baptism—a baptism into Jesus’ self-emptying death. As we have listened to each other during this synodal journey, what good news have we heard about the ways the Church (parish, diocese, universal) has been living out this mission? What challenges have we heard that would move us to become better washers of feet?</p> <p>Other approaches could be to play off the journey motif in the Exodus story, or preach on participation in the Eucharist as the source both of our communion with God and with each other and as what calls us to and empowers us for mission, our food for the journey.</p>
4/15/22 Friday of the Passion of the Lord	Is 52:13-53:12 Ps 31 Heb 4:14-16; 5:7-9 Jn 18:1-19:42	<p>Participation. As Christians, we are made participants in the paschal mystery—the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—through baptism. This synodal journey has challenged us: what in our lives, as individuals and as a community/institution, needs to be crucified? What are those ways of being that have closed us off to others and that now need to be set aside so we can be the Church God envisions us to be? As we come to the close of our Lenten journey back to the font, we do well to reflect on the ways that we as individuals, and communities, have not lived out our baptism.</p>
4/16/22 Easter Vigil	Seven 7 readings from the Old Testament, each with an accompanying psalm. Rom 6:3-11 Ps 118 Lk 24:1-12	<p>Communion. The Sacraments we celebrate tonight are all about communion. The Elect are baptized and confirmed, brought into the communion of the Church and of the Trinity. Candidates for full communion in the Church are confirmed and received. All are made one in the Eucharist. We receive a foretaste of resurrection life. How have the stories that we’ve heard over the past months reflect the joys of this kind of communion, or the heartbreak of its absence?</p> <p>The account of the women recounting their encounter at the tomb might also speak to the theme of mission: we are all called to be evangelists.</p>

During **Easter**time we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus and its implications in our lives. It may be helpful to consider one of the fruits of the synodal journey to be a more fulsome living of the Resurrection by the Church. That is, to be(come) more and more the Church God is calling us to be. The vision that we are being called to involves humble listening as well as bold speech. It is an inclusive vision: no one is left out.

We live in the in-between time. The fullness of the Reign of God, the fullness of Resurrection life, is here-but-not-yet. We catch a glimpse of it, hear an echo of it, get a foretaste of it in many ways. We do so in a privileged way at the Eucharist and in the life of the Church. The synodal process is about helping us discern how better to be a Church that reflects that Reign—about naming with joy and gratitude those ways how and times when we reveal God’s Reign, and naming, confessing, lamenting, and seeking forgiveness for those times that we have obscured it, hiding our light under a bushel basket.

Given the new timeline for this phase of the synod, reflections are provided only through the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter.

Day	Readings	One way to connect to the Synod...
<p>4/17/22 Easter Sunday of the Resurrection of the Lord</p>	<p>Acts 10:34a, 37-43 Ps 118 Col 3:1-4 or 1 Cor 5:6b-8 Jn 20:1-9</p>	<p>As with Christmas, Easter really isn’t the right day to preach about the Synod... the feast itself ought to take precedence. However... this is also a day when many who don’t frequent our parishes do come to Mass... so, if it is not too late, you have one more opportunity to extend an invitation to those who might feel like outsiders 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!</p> <p>The image of Mary Magdalene as the Apostle to the Apostles may be a way to speak of our common calling as missionary disciples.</p>
<p>4/24/22 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter (Sunday of Divine Mercy)</p>	<p>Acts 5:12-16 Ps 118 Rev 1:9-11a, 12-13, 17-19 Jn 20:19-31</p>	<p>Hopefully, our participation in this synodal journey has been an occasion for mercy to be given and received. Perhaps we have found mercy in the relationships, the communion, built and deepened though this sharing. Perhaps we have received the mercy of being truly heard, for the first time in a long time. Perhaps we have received the mercy of hearing the truth, spoken boldly and in love. Perhaps on this Divine Mercy Sunday, based on what we’ve heard, we need to seek forgiveness and the grace of deeper conversion—the grace to embrace the mission to be more merciful, welcoming, open. May this journey, filled with mercy, continue, as we live into Resurrection life!</p> <p>The story of Thomas can offer some insights into our being a synodal Church. First, note that the disciples rely on each other in their need. They might be afraid, but they have each other. That’s a good place to start as we undertake this synodal journey. It may be scary, but we have each other. Second, Jesus in their midst. How often we forget that the same is true for us! Jesus is with us; there is no need to fear. Jesus gave the disciples—as he has given us through baptism and confirmation—the gift of the Holy Spirit. So, we can be bold in speaking the truth and</p>



		<p>proclaiming the gospel! There is no need to stay hidden in the upper room—or behind the walls of our parish church!</p> <p>It sounds too good to be true. In that sense, we can relate to Thomas. I want to see proof that that Christ is with us and the Spirit is at work! Hopefully, the synodal journey that we've been on together these past months have provided just those glimpses for us. Hopefully, by our gathering and listening, we've encountered the wounded Body of Christ and been moved to deeper faith... and hope. Thomas's broken heart was healed. Might we pray and hope that becoming a more synodal Church will be a source of healing for all those with broken hearts whose stories we heard... and those who still don't feel welcomed enough to speak.</p> <p>It would also do us well to recognize that it was Thomas, after all was said and done, who saw most clearly – who recognized Jesus for who he truly is: “My Lord and my God!” Might we also pray that as we continue on our synodal journey our eyes and hearts will continue to be opened, so we might better recognize Christ among us.</p>
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