

SHARED FROM VERY REV. BAMBRICK, JACKSON

The Bishop gives a 'State of the Diocese' address each year at the convocation. Much of what he speaks of is already accessible on the diocesan website. The Bishop asked for comment on the Synod and the Eucharistic Revival. It seems both have received tepid response from the lay people of the Diocese. Many priests spoke of parishioners who really don't know much about the Synod or even what a Synod is. The following day the Bishop was at my table and a lively discussion ensued about the Synod. The Bishop turned to me and noted that St. Aloysius parish did a very good job bringing people together for the parish phase; we had the second largest turnout of any parish in the Diocese!

We priests know what a Synod is, but Pope Francis has re-structured the Synod process. Traditionally, from the apostolic times to our own time, Synods have been gatherings of bishops to advise the pope on matters of importance. Bishops are by nature apostles and successors of the apostles. The pope is Peter and so the apostles gather around Peter to advise and assist him. Synods fell out of favor in the West, largely replaced by Ecumenical Councils on the Universal Church level and by Plenary Councils on the national level. Pope St. Paul VI revived the Synod model after Vatican II. Synods are essentially advisory bodies to the pope, and they do not have teaching authority like an Ecumenical Council (think Vatican II). While some in the media have portrayed the upcoming Synod as a type of 'Vatican III', that is way overblown and ridiculous. Synods are important deliberative bodies. Pope Francis has opened the Synod agenda to the whole Church through meetings held at parish, diocese, and national levels. Additionally, he has opened the Synod Assembly to lay people and even non-Catholics and non-Christians. The Catholic lay members have been given equal voting rights with the bishops. The non-Catholic participants can offer advice, suggestions, and participate in the discussions, but cannot vote. This is an innovation.

Bishop O'Connell stressed that Pope Francis wishes to develop a Church that listens more and talks less. He wishes for a listening Church, and this is the central aim of the Synod on Synodality. The bishop expressed a desire to lower expectations for the coming Synod. Media outlets are promoting agendas for change in doctrine, dogma and discipline. No doubt the high secular media influence is a concern for Pope Francis, since he has decided that the meetings will take place without media presence to allow participants to freely express their thoughts without undue media pressure. As the Holy Father reminded the whole Church last week, the Synod is under the influence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Father's many collaborators have been saying that expectations for change are too high, and changing doctrine, dogma, and discipline are not on the agenda. Synods do not have the power to change those and frankly neither does the pope; he is bound by Holy Scripture, the words of the Savior, and the handed-down tradition. He cannot change what Christ has commanded, the apostles handed on and the fathers of the Church have taught, Ecumenical Councils have taught and prior popes have decreed. We can all do a little more listening though, and that would be a good thing.

Our role is to pray for the success of the Synod and that the participants allow themselves to be open to the docility of the Holy Spirit. While, quite literally, everyone wants to know the outcome, only the Holy Spirit knows that and we will not know until after the close of the Synod in the Fall of 2024 when the pope issues his Apostolic Letter accepting or rejecting the advice he has been given.

Peace and Good – Fr. Bambrick