

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (YEAR B)

October 17, 2021

Isaiah 53:10–11 • Hebrews 4:14–16 • Mark 10:35–45

I.

This past week I attended the annual priest convocation of the diocese, which took place in Harrisonburg.

(Incidentally, Harrisonburg was my first assignment as a priest, where I was assigned to Blessed Sacrament parish and James Madison University from 2006 to 2008.)

I can report to you that the priests were in good spirits.

We were especially happy to see each other because last year's gathering was canceled owing to the pandemic.

We are diverse group of priests, by virtue of age and, increasingly, race and ethnicity, as we have numerous international priests serving in the diocese.

The priest convocation includes theological presentations, time to mingle, common prayer, and Mass.

We celebrate three Masses that span the presbyterate, meaning the group of priests:

One Mass to welcome those new to the diocese;
another Mass to honor those celebrating jubilees:
25th, 50th, and other ordination anniversaries;
and a third Mass for those priests who have died during the past year.

Throughout each convocation, there is a sense that the presbyterate is journeying together.

We pause along the way to support one another, to reflect on our calling to serve the Church, and to be renewed in our priestly commitments.

II.

To me, this experience of the priest convocation offers a glimpse of what Pope Francis would like to do for the whole Church: bring about greater synodality.

“Synodality” is based on a Greek word—
Greek is the language of the New Testament—
that can be translated as “walking together.”

To help bring about this greater sense of being the Church, Francis has launched a two-year Synod of Bishops titled, “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission.”

The Synod of Bishops is not new.

There have always been various kinds of gatherings of bishops in Church history.

Pope St. Paul VI established the Synod of Bishops in 1965 as an advisory body to the pope.

Since then, the Synod of Bishops has met every few years to tackle various topics.

What is unique about the Synod of Bishops now underway is that it will be a worldwide consultation of the whole Church: bishops, priests, deacons, religious, lay men and women, and also the marginalized: the poor and those who have fallen away from the Church.

The diocesan phase of the Synod of Bishops begins this weekend.

The purpose of the synod is help the entire Church come together to listen, reflect, discern, and discuss where God is leading us— not for the purpose of changing doctrine, but rather to help each person to carry out the Church’s mission more effectively.

III.

Today's readings guide us along that path.

In the Gospel, we see the Church taking shape.

The Church is the community of believers
that Christ establishes by means of his paschal mystery;
that is, his passion, death, resurrection, ascension, and sending of the Holy Spirit.

Christ founds the Church upon the twelve apostles,
who are witnesses to his death and resurrection,
and who first receive the Holy Spirit in order to proclaim the Gospel.

But at the stage of Jesus' mission narrated in the Gospel,
the apostles do not yet realize what Christ will do,
and how they will share in his mission.

For this reason,
Jesus seeks to correct the misunderstandings of James and John:

“The cup that I drink, you will drink,
and with the baptism with which I am baptized,
you will be baptized.”

The term “baptism” means “immersion,”
and here it refers here to Jesus' death and resurrection.

That is the foundation of Christian baptism:
it is a participation in Christ's death and resurrection.

Baptism is what makes us followers of Christ
and members of the Church.

Through that sacrament,
we have communion with God and communion with one another.

No one is more important than anyone else in the Church.

Christ is clear that authority in the Church
is for the sake of serving others,
based on his own paschal mystery:

“Whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant;
whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all.
For the Son of Man did not come to be served
but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

It is a great blessing to belong to the Church,
which is the family of God.

In this community,
we hear the word of God,
and we receive the sacraments,
which renew the paschal mystery and apply it to our lives.

We also have the support of the Christian community:
one another, Catholics throughout the world,
and also the angels and saints in heaven.

The Synod of Bishops now underway
is an opportunity to rediscover the grace of belonging to the Church,
and renew our commitment to carrying out the Church’s mission.

Because Christ is not just my own personal Savior;
he is the Savior of humanity,
and he saves people through the Church.

The encouragement we hear in the Second Reading,
from the Letter to the Hebrews,
is addressed to the Christian community,
not just to an individual:

“Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens,
Jesus, the Son of God,
let us hold fast to our confession. ...
let us confidently approach the throne of grace
to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help.”

We're on our way toward the throne of grace.

God has gathered us as his Church—
for our salvation, and for the salvation of the whole world.