

26th Sunday in Ordinary Time

The word “synod” comes from words meaning “walking together.” As Pope Francis opens the Synod this week, he hopes we focus on three main themes: Communion, mission, and participation. The *Instrumentum laboris* for the synod says, “in the life of the synodal Church, communion, mission and participation are articulated, nourishing and supporting each other. They must always be understood with this integration in mind.” Notice that “mission” is in the middle. Communion implies mission, and participation gives these two concepts a concrete expression.

There is a parallel in the Mass, especially noteworthy in this year of the parish eucharistic revival promoted by the bishops of the United States. The revival is focusing our attention on what we share at communion: the Body and Blood of Christ. Jesus famously declared, “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you” (John 6:53). We come to ever greater awareness of his awesome presence when we meditate on this gift before the Blessed Sacrament.

As marvelous as this communion with Christ is by itself, it requires mission. Jesus also declared, “Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). We who have received this great gift of the Eucharist personally are expected to share its fruit with others.

Participation enlivens both these goals. When we participate in communion, we draw closer to Christ; when we participate in mission, the world draws closer to Christ.

All of us practice these three principles to varying degrees and often with great success. We make holy communion a regular part of our spiritual lives. We share our faith with others at home, at work and in public. At times we do not participate as well as we should. I like to encourage people to sit up close for Mass where you can participate more fully, pick up the hymn book when it is time to sing, observe the postures, make the responses, and above all, share in the Body and Blood of Christ. That’s communion. I like to encourage people outside Mass to become active in parish groups and spend time with their brothers and sisters in Christ both for social support and to amplify service to others. That is fulfilling the mission. When we do not participate well, we are like the son in today’s gospel who says, “Yes, I’ll go into the vineyard,” but then does not.

Fortunately, we have a forgiving Father, one who supports us as he encourages our participation. We pray to him in today’s psalm: “The sins of my youth and my frailties, remember not.” Instead, “Remember your mercies, O Lord.” Psalm 25 also declares, the Lord “shows sinners the way. He guides the humble to justice, and teaches the humble his way.” God helps us do better.

One of the most amazing moments in the Mass comes just before communion, when we repeat the words of the centurion in the gospel, “Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof.” Those words are true, but then the Lord comes to us anyway. As the synod begins this week, let us ponder the words “communion, mission and participation.” Even when we fail to do our best, the Lord will steady our steps, walking together on the road that leads to him.