**Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B: 17.10.21**

**Cathedral of the Assumption, Carlow Mass @ 10.30am**

**Launch of Universal Synodal Pathway**

**Introduction**:

Last Sunday Pope Francis reflecting on the gospel passage of the rich young man wishing to enter eternal life, reminded us that he came to Jesus with his question just “*as he was setting out on a journey*”[[1]](#footnote-1). Pope Francis used three words to tease out that question: **encounter**, **listen** and **discern**. And with those words he launched the Universal Synodal Journey, ‘*For a Synodal Church:* *Communion, Participation, Mission*’, inviting us at a local level to do similar launches this Sunday in every diocese in the world.

It is great to welcome you to the Cathedral of the Assumption here in Carlow as Kildare & Leighlin take the first steps on that journey. Synod comes from the Greek meaning “*to journey together*”. I’m told I walk quick, it’s a habit, I always did! The synodal journey invites me and all of us to adjust our step, sometimes walking ahead, often behind but mostly alongside each other.

The text this Sunday from Mark is as searing as last Sunday, inviting us to become servants of one another. This text revolutionises a hierarchical structure and indeed a clerical culture as together we reflect on ‘*what is the Lord saying to the Church in Kildare & Leighlin today?*’ To develop greater communion is not to expect everyone to be the same, but to overcome differences, to walk forward together, to hear what each other say and to share in the search for deeper answers to fundamental questions.

Like that rich young man of last Sunday, we are today just setting out on that journey, let’s pause for a moment as we call to mind our sins ..

Lord Jesus, you came to reach out to us with love and truth:

**Lord have mercy**.

You walk with us as we seek to live as followers of your Way:

**Christ have mercy**.

You lead us along the right path and bring light to those in darkness: **Lord have mercy**.

**Homily**:

In other years when October 17th doesn’t fall on a Sunday, we celebrate St. Ignatius of Antioch. Commentators suggest that St. Ignatius was the little child taken up by Jesus into His arms, whom we hear about in the previous chapter of Mark’s gospel[[2]](#footnote-2). The child held so tenderly and placed centre-stage by Jesus is offered as a template for all who wish to welcome and receive Jesus. It’s a beautiful feastday to launch the diocesan aspect of this universal synod. So what exactly is a Synod?

It comes from the two Greek words: ‘*syn*’ and ‘*hodos*’ meaning ‘*to journey together*’. I mentioned earlier the comments often said about my pace of normal walking! A synodal process goes at a pace of its own. I and all of us need to modify our step. A son told me at a recent funeral, what his dad said when their mam died: “*that’s the end of a wonderful 62 year journey*”. They had been married for sixty-two years. A synod brings all of us on a journey.

For the Church in Ireland, this universal synod with the title: ‘*For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission*’, coincides with our own synodal pathway towards a national synodal assembly in the next five years. Synod invites us then to travel on a journey, a journey together, but a journey where we are uncertain of its destination or end point. The synodal pathway is not a journey to some conclusion, final paper or document, the results of which we can implement. The pathway itself brings change, it’s a whole new way of being church.

The key question at the heart of our synodal pathway is: *What does God want from the Church in Ireland, the Church in Kildare & Leighlin at this time?* Not what do we want that neatly accommodates our agenda; not what does that group want that ticks the boxes of various red button issues; not what does the polar opposite group who are more interested in maintaining a system and structure that was built for a different time. *What does God want from the Church in Ireland, the Church in Kildare & Leighlin at this time?* is the question being asked of all people, both within the Church and in society at large, to share their insights into the Catholic Church in Ireland – past, present and future – so that we can prepare for a National Synodal Assembly in the coming years.

In Kildare and Leighlin, as we begin this process of walking together as a diocese, we are not starting from scratch. So much has happened in this diocese going back many years. Thirty years ago the diocese was probably the only one in the country employing someone in the space of pastoral planning. There have been many assemblies, listening sessions and focus groups. And there will be more. Our Diocesan Pastoral Council is currently reflecting on three S’s that has the potential to change the way we minister as Church – Sacraments, Sensitivities and Structures. Indeed since the Second Vatican Council we have been learning the synodal language of communion, participation and mission.

There is always the danger that todays gospel from St. Mark might not be heeded and we might become more entrapped in our silos of power and control, the antithesis of service. There can be a temptation among people of faith to get sucked into the vortex of polarisation and fragmentation. “*I am for Paul, I am for Apollos*”[[3]](#footnote-3). It’s too easy to forget we are all for Christ. He travels with us on our synodal journey. We must allow space for His dream to root in our hearts and in our conversations. Last Sunday Pope Francis appealed to us: “*Let us not soundproof our hearts; let us not remain barricaded in our certainties. So often our certainties can make us closed. Let us listen to one another*”[[4]](#footnote-4). We pray our prayer as that listening begins …

**Prayer for the Universal Synodal Pathway**:

**We stand before You, Holy Spirit,**

**as we gather together in Your name.**

**With You alone to guide us,**

**make Yourself at home in our hearts;**

**Teach us the way we must go**

**and how we are to pursue it.**

**We are weak and sinful;**

**do not let us promote disorder.**

**Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path**

**nor partiality influence our actions.**

**Let us find in You our unity**

**so that we may journey together to eternal life**

**and not stray from the way of truth**

**and what is right.**

**All this we ask of You,**

**who are at work in every place and time,**

**in the communion of the Father and the Son,**

**forever and ever. Amen.**

1. Mk.10:17 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Mk.9:36-37 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. 1Cor.3:4 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Pope Francis, Homily in St. Peters: 10 October 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)