

# Prayer and the Synodal Process

## A guide for synod coordinators

Prayer, and in particular reflection on the word of God, is an essential part of the synodal process. It is not just a way to begin and end the meeting. It is meant to infuse the entire gathering. Time spent in prayer is not an add-on to these gatherings, but a critical dimension of the synodal process.

There are no prescriptions about what this prayer should look like or sound like. It can, and should, be different in different contexts, reflecting the age, experience, and cultural background of those who gather. For gatherings with non-Catholics, or deeply wounded or marginalized communities, an entirely different form of prayer – or simply a time of silence – might be more appropriate.

### PRAYER AHEAD OF TIME

- Celebrate the Eucharist regularly, especially the Sunday Eucharist. The Eucharist is called *viaticum*, food for the journey. On this Synodal journey, we need the Eucharist, the source of life and unity for the Church, which fills us with sacramental grace and forms us into the one Body of Christ.
- Include the synodal gatherings in the Prayer of the Faithful at parish Masses in advance of the gathering. Some examples:
  - *For our parish community as we participate in the synodal process, that we may listen to one another as together we reflect on how the Holy Spirit is guiding our Church. We pray to the Lord.*
  - *For all who will participate in the synodal process this week, that we may share with honesty, listen with respect, and be drawn more deeply into communion and mission. We pray to the Lord.*
  - *For our parish community as we participate in the synodal process, that we may truly be a listening Church, reaching out to those on the margins. We pray to the Lord.*
- Encourage parishioners to pray for the Synod, using the traditional prayer *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*, or another prayer.
- Invite all who will participate in a synodal sharing to pray daily before their session.

### PREPARATION OF THE SPACE

- **Create a prayerful space.**
- For in-person meetings, you might place the Gospel Book or Bible in the midst of the space. Where possible, place candles, an icon, or a crucifix in the space.
- For Zoom meetings, consider how to create a prayerful atmosphere, perhaps using the “share screen” function to have an appropriate image or music video as people arrive.

## PRAYER AT THE BEGINNING OF THE GATHERING

- Begin with music if possible (an appropriate hymn or a Psalm, e.g. Psalm 25, 67, 104, 123)
- Time for silence
- A prayerful reading of a Scripture passage (e.g. Acts 2:1-11, 14-19; Acts 2:42-47; I Corinthians 3:9c-11, 16-17; I Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13; Ephesians 2:19-22; I Peter 2:4-9)
- Silent reflection on the Scripture
- In a small group, faith sharing on the Scripture would be appropriate; in a large group, time for reflection, journaling
- A short meditation from Pope Francis could be read (some examples are included in this packet)
- Pray the *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus* prayer (found on the next page) together

## PRAYER DURING THE GATHERING

- Provide times for quiet reflection, meditation, journaling at natural breaks in the gathering

## PRAYER AT THE CONCLUSION OF THE GATHERING

- Leader invites all to take a few moments of silent reflection on the gathering
- Time for silence
- A prayerful reading of a brief Scripture passage, (e.g. James 1:27)
- Pray the traditional Prayer to the Holy Spirit together
- Concluding song if possible
- Invitation to exchange a sign of peace

## **Opening Prayer for a Synod Gathering**

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.<sup>1</sup>

## **Concluding Prayer to the Holy Spirit**

V. Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful,

R. And kindle in them the fire of your love.

V. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created.

R. And You shall renew the face of the earth.

Let us pray.

O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit,  
did instruct the hearts of the faithful,  
grant that by the same Holy Spirit  
we may be truly wise

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<sup>1</sup> (*Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*, a 6<sup>th</sup>-century prayer attributed to St. Isidore of Seville, simplified)

and ever enjoy His consolations,  
Through Christ our Lord. Amen.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *A traditional Catholic prayer to the Holy Spirit (cf. Psalm 104)*

## Brief reflections from Pope Francis on the Synodal Process

*In a larger group, one of the following reflections from Pope Francis providing context for the synodal process might be read as part of the opening prayer.*

“The Gospels frequently show us Jesus “on a journey”; he walks alongside people and listens to the questions and concerns lurking in their hearts. He shows us that God is not found in neat and orderly places, distant from reality, but walks ever at our side. He meets us where we are, on the often rocky roads of life. Today, as we begin this synodal process, let us begin by asking ourselves – all of us, Pope, bishops, priests, religious and laity – whether we, the Christian community, embody this “style” of God, who travels the paths of history and shares in the life of humanity. Are we prepared for the adventure of this journey? Or are we fearful of the unknown, preferring to take refuge in the usual excuses: “It’s useless” or “We’ve always done it this way”? Celebrating a Synod means walking on the same road, walking together.<sup>3</sup>”

“As we initiate this process, we are called to become experts in the art of encounter.... taking time to encounter the Lord and one another... devoting time to adoration, and to hearing what the Spirit wants to say to the Church. Time to look others in the eye and listen to what they have to say, to build rapport, to be sensitive to the questions of our sisters and brothers, to let ourselves be enriched by the variety of charisms, vocations and ministries. Every encounter – as we know – calls for openness, courage and a willingness to let ourselves be challenged by the presence and the stories of others.... the experience of encounter changes us; frequently it opens up new and unexpected possibilities.<sup>4</sup>”

“Let us ask ourselves frankly during this synodal process: Are we good at listening? How good is the “hearing” of our heart? Do we allow people to express themselves, to walk in faith even though they have had difficulties in life, and to be part of the life of the community without being hindered, rejected or judged? Participating in a Synod means placing ourselves on the same path as the Word made flesh. It means following in his footsteps, listening to his word along with the words of others. It means discovering with amazement that the Holy Spirit always surprises us, to suggest fresh paths and new ways of speaking. It is a slow and perhaps tiring exercise, this learning to listen to one another – bishops, priests, religious and laity, all the baptized – and to avoid artificial and shallow and pre-packaged responses. The Spirit asks us to listen to the questions, concerns and hopes of every Church, people and nation. And to listen to the world, to the challenges and changes that it sets before 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.<sup>5</sup>”

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<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, Homily for the Opening of the Synodal Process.

<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2021/documents/20211010-omelia-sinodo-vescovi.html>

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, Homily for the Opening of the Synodal Process.

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“You have come by many different roads and from different Churches, each bearing your own questions and hopes. I am certain the Spirit will guide us and give us the grace to move forward together, to listen to one another and to embark on a discernment of the times in which we are living, in solidarity with the struggles and aspirations of all humanity. I want to say again that the Synod is not a parliament or an opinion poll; the Synod is an ecclesial event and its protagonist is the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit is not present, there will be no Synod.<sup>6</sup>”

“Let us keep going back to God’s own “style”, which is closeness, compassion and tender love. God has always operated that way. If we do not become this Church of closeness with attitudes of compassion and tender love, we will not be the Lord’s Church. Not only with words, but by a presence that can weave greater bonds of friendship with society and the world. A Church that does not stand aloof from life, but immerses herself in today’s problems and needs, bandaging wounds and healing broken hearts with the balm of God. Let us not forget God’s style, which must help us: closeness, compassion and tender love.<sup>7</sup>”

“Dear brothers and sisters, may this Synod be a true season of the Spirit! For we need the Spirit, the ever new breath of God, who sets us free from every form of self-absorption, revives what is moribund, loosens shackles and spreads joy. The Holy Spirit guides us where God wants us to be, not to where our own ideas and personal tastes would lead us. Father Congar, of blessed memory, once said: “There is no need to create another Church, but to create a different Church” (True and False Reform in the Church). That is the challenge. For a “different Church”, a Church open to the newness that God wants to suggest, let us with greater fervour and frequency invoke the Holy Spirit and humbly listen to him, journeying together as he, the source of communion and mission, desires: with docility and courage.<sup>8</sup>”

“Come, Holy Spirit! You inspire new tongues and place words of life on our lips: keep us from becoming a “museum Church”, beautiful but mute, with much past and little future. Come among us, so that in this synodal experience we will not lose our enthusiasm, dilute the power of prophecy, or descend into useless and unproductive discussions. Come, Spirit of love, open our hearts to hear your voice! Come, Holy Spirit of holiness, renew the holy and faithful People of God! Come, Creator Spirit, renew the face of the earth! Amen.<sup>9</sup>”

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<sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, Address for the Opening Session, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2021/october/documents/20211009-apertura-camminosinodale.html>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.