

Preparing for the 2023 Synod with Pope Francis

As you know, we have been asked by Pope Francis to take some part in the Synod of 2023 which will hopefully go a long way towards charting the future of our Church in very challenging times. The Pope wants to ‘listen’ to everyone and their concerns and hopes as well as ‘walking together’ along what we now call ‘the synodal path’. It is easy for us to be somewhat indifferent and unconcerned about this process as it has happened before and such projects have come to very little, but this cannot happen now. Too much is at stake. There is always the danger of ‘the fallacy of the big event’ where we prepare carefully and thoughtfully for something that comes and goes with little meaningful outcome, leaving us dispirited and disenchanted. But the Pope wants to reform this ailing Church to make it truly what Our Lord wants it (us) to be, and coupled with this to play our part in saving our planet and protecting all who live in it, especially those who are hungry, homeless, persecuted or exploited. The way ahead should not involve setting up structures, policies and procedures but lies in the heart and mind of every single person, which is why the Pope wants to have some form of ‘listening exercise’ whereby he can gauge the actual situation in which we live. This is not the time for endless meetings with self-opinionated, ‘hobby horsed’ people coming to trot out their complaints with great ideas of what ‘other people’ should do and little vision on how to resolve them. Somehow we need to find the way to listen to the genuine hopes and fears of quiet, faithful people, young and old, married and single, so that we can plan a realistic response to Pope Francis. This situation is not about the lack of priests but how each of us can live up to our baptismal calling in the life of discipleship of Our Lord. So the first question we need to ask ourselves is precisely this – what does a ‘life of discipleship’ mean for me today? When Pope Benedict came to England in 2010 to beatify Cardinal John Henry Newman, he used Newman’s own words as the motto for his visit –“Cor ad Cor loquitur” – ‘heart speaks to heart’ and this is an excellent way of our proceeding.

Whatever long-term hopes and plans we might have, what needs to happen soon is that lay people are given meaningful authority in the Church and not just seen as appendages to their priests. We do not necessarily need to make more clerics but to empower everyone so that we can all live together in the Lord’s family and look after each other. This of course has been happening for some years already almost imperceptibly in our parishes – groups have met not simply for social purposes but to offer friendship and support to each other and in so doing have played a significant part in the mission of the Church – theatre group, Sunshine club, prayer groups, Developing World Support Groups, Catenians, Friendly Club and more, but especially the pastoral teams in each parish and the Eucharistic ministry which reaches out in love to those who are housebound. The catechesis of our children, parents and young people, preparation for baptism and the careful planning of funerals has been taking place for a long time now almost without anyone noticing. So what can we do? Many years ago, I did a course on the Open University in which the following appeared that I have always seen as a benchmark for our work: ‘you set up a service or facility in response to an expressed need’. This is in contrast to someone’s latest ‘bright idea’, which may have no basis in reality. Thus we have to discern the ‘needs’ before we can plan how to meet them. Accordingly I would ask you all to write to me (anonymously if you wish) expressing your hopes and fears, and also how you have been coping with them in your family. Your replies will be carefully considered and framed into a response we make to Pope Francis. If there is a need for a get-together we will surely arrange it. What is it that keeps me in this Church of ours? What is it

that helps me to pray and discover the desire to serve Our Lord? What can I do and who can I be for Him today and in the future? These are the sort of questions we might ask ourselves and hopefully will answer them honestly and truthfully.

St.Dominic's Fund

Part of this synod journey of 'walking together' is the sensitive and caring support of each other by being willing to share what we have with them. Before Christmas, I asked for some help for those families and individuals who were struggling financially at the time and the response was very generous indeed. Their needs, however, have not ceased and with the forthcoming sharp rise in the cost of fuel, many people will have the awesome choice of 'eat or heat' to make in their homes and this should never be. A good few of us have more money than we need and to give it to others is not a matter of charity but justice, sharing our own resources with those who need them more than we do. This is at the heart of our 'life of discipleship'. After discussion with the pastoral teams, we have decided to set up what we will call "St.Dominic's Fund", which will be a resource of voluntary contributions to be distributed to the needy members of our communities in a courteous and sensitive manner so that they are not embarrassed or feel they are being patronised. Small teams of people in each parish have agreed to take on this work and they may be contacted if you have a specific need or are suffering some financial hardship. and if you are faced with the 'eat or heat' dilemma, please do so and your application will be dealt with confidentially. Envelopes will be printed with the words, St.Dominic's Fund' and be available in our churches for us to use and put them in the sacristy or through the Priory letterbox. Cash would be better than cheques as we do not have a bank account. The people who have agreed to supervise this are:

Hinckley – Valerie Mason (01455 610472) Marina Brooks (01455 457477) and Louisa Rinaldi-Oxley (at school – 01455 634087)

Earl Shilton – Brian Underwood (01455 841243) Sheena Taylor (01455 698066) and Helen White (at school- 01455 843840)

Market Bosworth – Eric Vavasour (01455 847028) and Pat Glover (01455 291593)

St.Martin's School – Lucy Chapman (01455 212386)

The most important thing is that we will only see sense in the 'synodal path' if we walk it and we will only realise the full significance of our faith if we live it. There are countless examples of how this has actually been happening here for years, particularly in the accompaniment of each other through times good and bad, but the bottom line is always the same: can we allow our minds and hearts to be changed, eyes and ears opened, hands ready to serve, feet ready to follow? So don't be afraid of love; don't be afraid to love, no matter what it costs. "I have my mission" in the great words of St.John Henry Newman, applies to all of us individually and as a community. Let us not be afraid at this time to accept our calling wherever it may lead us.

Father Frank

January 2022