***Monthly Spiritual Message***

**October 2023**

**FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH**

In this month of October, when we celebrate the Solemnity of Our Holy Father St Francis, the Church is about to embark on a momentous time in her history. It is called "SYNOD;' and Pope Francis has called for us to reflect on the theme: "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission."

Pope Francis has indicated that it is not a Parliament with winners and losers but rather an attempt to discern how the Church can better fulfill its mandate to preach the Good News of Jesus Christ in every place and culture for the benefit of all God's People.

In Sacred Scripture, we have a "yardstick;" it's not about someone's personal preference, but what, before God, this community of faith believed God was now calling it to do. We need to hear what the Holy Spirit is saying to the entire Church now.

The Spirit that pervaded the Council of Jerusalem has been needed in every time and culture where the Good News of Jesus has been proclaimed and still needs to be proclaimed by word and deed.

Together, we are inspired by listening to the Word of God through the living tradition of the Church and grounded in the "Sensus Fidei" that we share. We all have a role in discerning and living God's call for His People.

Participation is based on the fact that all the faithful are qualified and are called to serve one another through the gifts they have each received from the Holy Spirit in Baptism.

The whole community of the Church is called together to pray, listen, analyze, dialogue, discern, and offer advice on making pastoral decisions which correspond as closely as possible to God's Will.

MISSION: Our mission is to witness the love of God in the midst of the whole human family. Since the time of St Francis and his first friars, our ministries, and our ability to serve those in need is summed up in his words: "Remember when you leave this earth, you can take nothing that you have received, only what you have given.''

We as Franciscans must embody the reality of Gospel Living within the Church, namely that within our communities, there is a common home where all are welcome, hearts can be reconciled, sins may be forgiven, and differences respected, because nothing can be lost, and no one should be abandoned or left behind.

We are constantly reminded how important it is to bring our charism to the world. How do we translate that relationship to the Church and the world we live in? As Franciscans, we need to be the bridge to reach out and be more welcoming by inviting people of every age and lifestyle to be authentic brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ in ways that matter and are effective.

The Synod offers the whole Franciscan Order a new way of being Church in our Franciscan Pilgrimage. The Synod calls for a change in mindset from "collaboration" to "co-responsibility.'' Our gift to the Church is the sense of what it means to be "fraternitas" (Fraternity). This vision of fraternity invites us to see each other as more than roles and functions.

The Minister General of the OFS, Tibor Kauser, requested the OFS, both individuals and the fraternities, to participate in the Synod, asking for our 'precious contributions'. The vision of building up the Church side by side with people has been part of the Franciscan Vision of "Church" since the Middle Ages. Pope Innocent III wrote, "When Jesus fed the 5,000, it was Jesus who gave nourishment and the people who received nourishment. The job of the Apostles was to wait on tables, wash the dishes, and clean up the leftovers. It is the job of the clergy and the religious as well to wait on tables and clean up the leftovers.

This is the heart and vision of the Church as a living synod: it is the Laity's work to make the Church real in space and time. A professor of mine, himself a Friar, once said: "It is the duty of the Laity to make real the Church in any given place and time. The clergy and religious can guide them and teach them, cheer them on, and inspire them, but they can never do the work of the Laity for them.

The work of the Laity is expressed in the English word "liturgy" from the Greek *"leiton ourgia"* meaning the People's Work. Every time we celebrate Mass or any other liturgy, we affirm once more that the Church of God is a living synod.

For our Franciscan Family, living as brothers and sisters and listening to the voice of each other has always been an ideal. Community life for all Franciscans has always meant more than observing rules and regulations but rather it is to be the sharing of a life that is central to our identity and mission.

Periodic Chapter Gatherings are special times for the Order to gather for prayer, listening, and discerning the promptings of the Holy Spirit. The fuller the participation, the fuller the mission. Pope Francis would like the whole Church to operate in this manner, discovering together what God is calling us to do and how to walk towards the future together.

Pax et Bonum! Happy Feast Day to you all.

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