

**Mass for the Opening of the Synod of Bishops 2023
in the Local Church of Paisley**

(Readings: Deuteronomy 6:2-6: Hebrews 7:23-28: Mark 12:28-34).

Dear Brothers and Sisters, we gather here today in our Saint Mirin's Cathedral to celebrate the commencement of the process of the Synod of Bishops in 2023 at the local level of our Diocese of Paisley. We gather in the vision of Pope Francis who is calling the whole Church in every diocese across the world to enter into this synodal journey and so become more fully what we are called to be: a Church of Communion, Participation and Mission.

Synod is made up of two ancient Greek words: *odos*, which means a journey or pilgrimage, from which we get odyssey or epic journey; and *syn*, which means together. So synod is about us going on a journey together.

From its earliest years our Church was synodal. The Acts of the Apostles recalls the first Synod in Jerusalem around year 50AD when the whole Church came together to discern in the Holy Spirit whether gentile converts were obliged to be circumcised. In the end, happily, the Holy Spirit showed them that that Baptism replaced circumcision as initiation into the Church.

At the Second Vatican Council the Spirit encouraged the Church to come together more regularly in Synod to continue the brotherly exchange it had experienced in the Council sessions. Since then our Synods of Bishops with the Pope have bestowed on the Church riches teachings on the Eucharist and the Word of GOD, on the vocation of the lay faithful in the life and mission of the Church and on priestly formation, on youth, catechesis, marriage and family life, and on the new evangelisation. In this way they have opened up for us new pathways and shed precious new light on the mystery of our faith that now radiates more brilliantly across the earth.

This Synod, however, will be unique in involving not just the Pope and Bishops but all of us in a journey of sharing, reflecting and listening. In this synodal process we will reflect not so much on what we believe but upon who we are as a Church. We are not looking so

much to reach a goal as to live the experience of walking together, with no-one's experience being left out or left behind. To put it more simply, the Pope wants us to become a Church that *walks the walk rather than just talks the talk*.

It is good to reflect that Jesus sent out His disciples two by two. Sending them He gave them a mission; sending them to walk together in pairs, they would be witnesses that the LORD's mission creates communion among peoples. In this way, communion and mission describe the mystery of the Church: a sign of GOD's communion with humanity and a call to humanity to recognise our identity as a global family.

Our vocation to be a people of communion and mission, of course, can go forward only IN the concrete participation and real involvement of everyone. So, *enabling everyone to participate is an essential duty for the Church*. For Pope Francis: it means understanding that the Church is a communion of brothers and sisters before it is a hierarchy of clergy and lay faithful; it means thinking about the real lives of our people instead of immediately turning to theologies *far removed from their real lives and communities*; and it means being daring in going forward and not getting stuck in the old *complacency which says, 'we have always done it this way*, thus applying the *poison of old solutions to new problems*.

Avoiding these dangers, Pope Francis hopes our Church can grasp new opportunities: not so much of holding synods from time to time but of becoming *a synodal Church, where all can feel at home and participate*; of becoming a *listening Church, listening firstly to the Spirit in adoration and prayer, and then to our brothers and sisters, their hopes, the crises of faith around the world, the need for renewed pastoral life*; and finally, being a *Church of closeness to each other and the world by our presence nearby, bandaging wounds and healing broken hearts with the balm of God*.

In the Scribe who comes up to Jesus and puts a question to Him we catch a glimpse of a man of faith who has undergone this very transition from old, tired and worn out ways about thinking of his religion to a new, exciting and passionate vision of things and who therefore embodies who Pope Francis hopes each of us can become.

As an interpreter of the Law who copied it meticulously from one papyrus to another, thus Scribe's training would have led him to be concerned only for the letter of the Law and to ensure it was handed down *verbatim*. He would have liked how the people honoured him for his education and outward observance of the Law. Beyond study of the traditions of the past, there would have been little opportunity for him in his formation to reflect on the spirit of the Law and its deeper challenge to protect and promote truth, justice and mercy for the people and their communities.

That was until he encountered the person of Jesus and learned from Him how authentic faith grows from a relationship with GOD in our hearts that allows us to discover and appreciate the unique value of every person in the eyes of GOD. In Jesus, the Scribe saw how discovering GOD in our hearts and in each other was the only way to avoid hypocrisy and pride in our faith. It showed him how to want only to share and lighten the load of his brothers and sisters rather than placing more heavy burdens on their backs.

The LORD wants to teach us, too, how faith like this, *written in our hearts*, and expressed in *love with all our heart, soul and strength*, is what fulfils our lives, what attracts our children and grandchildren to GOD and what brings true development to humanity, and is *not far from the kingdom of God*.

Traveling together in this way of the LORD means showing our weakness before each other as clergy and laity, as well as our mortality and sins, contaminated as we are by this poor and fallen world.

But this only points us in the direction of the One Who alone is *holy, innocent and uncontaminated, beyond the influence of sinners, and raised up above the heavens*; Who Sacrificed Himself *once and for all* for us and the world *by offering Himself* on the Cross; *Who remains for ever to intercede for us who come to God through him*; and *Whose power to save is utterly certain*.