

**ADDRESS OF HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL CHRISTOPHE PIERRE  
APOSTOLIC NUNCIO TO THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA  
*REDISCOVERING SYNODALITY WITHIN THE EUCHARIST*  
ST. ELIZABETH ANN SETON CHURCH – HIAWATHA, IOWA  
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Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Good afternoon!

I am happy to be here in Dubuque once again, and especially to convey to all of you the spiritual presence of the Holy Father Pope Francis. I am grateful to Archbishop Zinkula, who has invited me to speak to you about the convergence of two important themes in the Church today: Eucharistic revival and synodality.

*Being a Synodal Church*

To rediscover ourselves as a “synodal Church”: this is what Pope Francis is calling us to. Synodality is the style of engagement that we, as Catholics, need to practice in order to bring about the new evangelization. Being a synodal Church will help us to spread the Gospel in a way that will connect with the needs of the people of today. It will help us to transmit the faith more effectively to our children and grandchildren.

What is *synodality*? Well, it might help first to identify what it is not. Synodality does mean that we turn the Church into a “board of directors”. It doesn’t mean deciding the Church’s doctrines by a vote, or that everything is “up for grabs”. Nor does it mean that the Church will simply adopt the standards of the world in which we live. Unfortunately, that is how some people in the Church have characterized this synodal approach. But that’s not true!

What, then, is synodality? At the simplest level, the word *synod* means being “together on the way”. Another word for *synod* is “assembly”. We are an assembly of people who are moving together in a certain direction. For the Church, it is helpful to remember that whenever we are assembled together in the name of Jesus, the Holy Spirit is always there to guide us: to preserve and deepen our unity, to bring harmony out of diversity, and to reveal to us the way to go. In essence, the Church is a synod. We are journeying together as “God’s flock along the paths of history towards the

encounter with the Christ the Lord”.<sup>1</sup> Because the Church is a synod – an assembly of people journeying together – “we understand too that, within the Church, no one can be ‘raised up’ higher than the others. On the contrary, in the Church, it is necessary that each person ‘lower’ himself or herself, so as to serve our brothers and sisters along the way.”<sup>2</sup>

To see why the Church is a synod, we only need to look at the Gospel stories to see how Jesus behaved with the people he encountered. When the woman caught in adultery was placed before him, he bent down so that he could be on the same level as she.<sup>3</sup> When the sinful woman at a banquet bathed and anointed his feet, he not only permitted her, but he also praised her for her act of love.<sup>4</sup> He ate with tax collectors, having already chosen one of them to be his disciple.<sup>5</sup> He touched a person who had leprosy.<sup>6</sup> As he was dying, he promised a condemned criminal that he would be with him in paradise.<sup>7</sup> Time and again, Jesus welcomed the company of people whom others, including the religious leaders, felt the need to exclude in order to preserve their own purity.

But he also did something else with the people whom he welcomed. After forgiving them, healing them, and restoring them to communion with God’s family, he sent them to announce the good news of what God had done for them.<sup>8</sup> In other words, Jesus didn’t only welcome people who were on the peripheries: he actually brought people from the peripheries, from the margins of society, to the center of his work. He made them, not merely recipients of God’s charity, but actual protagonists of the Church’s saving mission!

Who are the people on the margins of today’s society? The poor. Migrants. People who have been abused or exploited. People with disabilities. People who are discriminated against because of their race or ethnicity. Also, people whose life circumstances, spiritual or moral conditions present challenges to their being fully integrated in the Church’s life; and yet, they still want to know the love of Christ. These

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, Address for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops, 17 October 2015.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *John* 8:2-11.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Luke* 7:36-50.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Matthew* 9:9-10.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Matthew* 8:2-3.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Luke* 23:40-43.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. *Luke* 8:38-39.

are people whom we tend to push to the outside. It is not “efficient” to include them in our projects. They “get in the way”. We might serve them or offer them a work of charity...but Christ wants us to do more than that. We need to bring people who are on the margins into the center of the Church’s discernment and mission. They need to become, together with us, protagonists of the Gospel.

My brothers and sisters, this is the synodal way. It was the way that Jesus practiced when he was on earth, and so it must be our way now, as his Church. We are his presence in the world today.

Regarding synodality, Pope Francis says: “We must continue along this path. The world in which we live, and which we are called to love and serve, even with its contradictions, demands that the Church strengthen cooperation in all areas of her mission. It is precisely this path of *synodality* which God expects of the Church in third millennium.”<sup>9</sup>

Why is synodality necessary in every part of our work as Church? Because all who want to be a part of Christ’s Body need to become protagonists of the Gospel. This means being agents of the Gospel message, not just passive recipients. There is an old saying in the Church about the duties of laypeople: “Pray, pay, and obey.” But no! That’s not it! That’s not the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on the role of the lay faithful in the life of the Church. Please, you should continue to do all of those things: pray, pay, and obey. I’m sure that will make your Archbishop happy! But you will make him even more happy if your Christian mission doesn’t end there. Here is what we believe about the mission of baptized Catholics:

“Because the lay faithful belong to Christ, Lord and King of the Universe, they share in his *kingly mission* and are called by him to spread that Kingdom in history. They exercise their kingship as Christians, above all in the spiritual combat in which they seek to overcome in themselves the kingdom of sin (cf. *Rom* 6:12), and then to make a gift of themselves so as to serve, in justice and in charity, Jesus who is himself present in all his brothers and sisters, above all in the very least (cf. *Mt* 25:40).”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Address for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Synod of Bishops.

<sup>10</sup> Pope St. John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifidelis Laici* On the Vocation and the Mission of the Lay Faithful in the Church and in the World, 30 December 1988, 14.

The Church should not function as if there is one higher class of people who impart the Gospel – the ordained, religious, and “specialists” – and a second, lower class of people who only receive the Gospel. After receiving the saving message, you are sent to spread and give the message to others, according to the unique gifts and charisms that the Holy Spirit has given you. Your unique experience in the world also gives you the ability to interpret the Gospel in light of that experience, and to apply the Gospel to the real situations in which you live. By doing this, you help the Church understand the message of Christ. Your insights can help guide the pastoral leaders of the Church in imparting the message of the Gospel more effectively – and in ways that are more in touch with contemporary realities. This is part of what it means in practice to be a synodal Church. Pastors, the ordained, the consecrated, and the lay faithful are all “co-responsible” for the Church’s mission.

When I say that there are no “second-class citizens” in the Church, and that laypeople can help guide their pastoral leaders according to the wisdom that they gain from their specific place in the world, I would at the same issue a caution. There are some within the Church, both lay and ordained, who think they are “guiding” the Church by contradicting the message of the Holy Father. Please: let us listen to the Pope, because he is a source of unity for all the bishops and the faithful. This is a gift from Christ. How can we have an effective mission to the world if we are not united with our Holy Father? This is important.

### *Rediscovering the Eucharist as a Synodal Encounter with the Risen Christ*

I hope I’ve given you a sense of what it means when we talk about being a synodal Church. What, then, about the Eucharist – and in particular, Eucharistic revival? How can we live the Eucharist as a synodal reality?

This country’s Eucharistic Revival is a movement that was begun a few years ago by the U.S. Bishops and that reached its high point in the recent Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis. When the Eucharistic Revival was initiated several years ago, it did not come from a vacuum. There was a social and political context, as well as religious. The political context had to do with how to respond to Catholic politicians and a Catholic President who advanced policies that contradicted Catholic teachings

while at the same time presenting themselves as faithful communicants. The Bishops were also concerned about studies indicating that many Catholics did not hold to the Church's belief in the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. And of course, there was the decline in numbers of Catholics who attended Sunday Mass.

To meet this reality, the Bishops determined to promote a three-year Eucharistic Revival, which reached a kind of apex at the recent Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis. This Revival has encouraged greater devotion to the Blessed Sacrament through parish, diocesan, and national programs. The Eucharistic Congress in July was very well-organized, and it was marketed and televised in a very professional and attractive manner. It was attended by many of the country's bishops, thousands of priests and religious, and tens of thousands of lay Catholics. It has received a significant amount of attention in the Catholic media, as well as coverage by secular media.

The Congress has clearly been a success from the perspective of those who attended and participated in it. What stands out the most are the personal stories of attendees and participants, who remark on the consoling experiences of unity and shared worship, focus on the Eucharistic Christ, and messages from the speakers that were both encouraging and challenging. What occurred at the Congress is what we expect to occur when we unite in a fervent petition to our loving God to be present to us and to make us one: He shows up, and he showers his grace and his love upon us. Certainly, there are many Catholics around the country today who feel blessed by God's love and by the communion that they enjoy within God's Church.

By the end of the Congress, there was an explicit recognition on the part of the speakers and organizers that this Congress was not supposed to be the ending of something, but rather the beginning. The beginning of a new impetus of evangelization. The beginning of a new and greater effort on the part of this country's Catholics to spread the good news of the life-giving encounter with Christ that was experienced by the participants at the Congress.

And this, my friends, is crucial. As great as this Eucharistic Revival has been for those Catholics who have been actively involved in it, it would fall short of its potential if it were not to contribute to the Church's mission of evangelization in a lasting way. In order to do so, it must become truly synodal.

In fact, the experience of the Eucharist does not need to “become” synodal. Rather, we ourselves must rediscover that the Eucharist is already a synodal encounter with the Lord and with one another. In order to rediscover this reality, we must have our eyes and our faith opened wider to the Eucharist in all its dimensions. In the Eucharist, Christ is risen! His presence among us in the Eucharist is a fact already given. He has chosen to be present to us in this way. He is with us in the Eucharistic celebration: in the word of God, in the minister and the participants, and in the consecrated bread and wine. He is present in us when we eat and drink of him. He makes us into his body, his presence in the world. This truth – the truth of his risen presence – is something that we need to acknowledge more fully. When we do this, the Eucharist ceases to be something that we “look at”, as if from the outside. But instead, we “enter in” to our Lord’s presence, and we walk with him. This is why Christ gave us the Eucharist: so that he can be with us, and so that he can feed us with his own life.

“Once you have encountered Christ in adoration,” says Pope Francis, “once you have touched and received Him in the Eucharistic celebration, you can no longer keep Him for yourself, but become a missionary of His love for others.”<sup>11</sup> United with Christ in the Eucharist, we can love others enough to join them on their journey, as Jesus did when he joined the disciples on the road to Emmaus.<sup>12</sup> This is the way in which the Eucharist makes us a synod. Christ joins us to his own risen life, and because of this, we have the ability to share the life of Christ with others who seek him.

As we celebrate this Eucharist together, let us look for all the ways in which Christ is present to us. Let’s allow him to open our eyes to the ways that he is living and acting among us. And then, let us follow him along the path of this history that we are living with him and with one another.

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<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis, Message for the National Eucharistic Congress in Madagascar, 3 August 2024.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Luke* 24:13-35.