



Towards Renewing the Church

- 3 —

Through the Power of the Gospel

*For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice,
but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.*

(2 Timothy 1:7)

There is a lot happening in our Church!

Envisioned by Pope Francis in 2021, the Bishops' Synod on synodality opened its first session in Rome ten days ago. This synod calls us to "open up the horizons of hope for the fulfillment of the Church's mission", as stated in the preparatory document. Should you, like me, be following what is happening, I remain attentive to what this time of grace will entail for the universal Church, because it will surely have an influence on our own efforts.

On the other hand, there are also things going on in our Diocese!

I'd like to draw your attention to one happy aspect: I have noticed that a synodal approach is gradually taking root in the way we do things. Synodality is not just a slogan; it is embodied in very concrete attitudes. This is what I am reading in the annual reviews of the pastoral teams and this is what I am hearing from many people since the beginning of our diocesan synodal process :

"I am listening to people more."

"I am learning to delegate."

"We are making decisions together."

"I am challenging people more and involving volunteers more."

"In our meetings, I am encouraging spiritual conversations."

"I am getting off the beaten track and am reaching out to the periphery."

"I am practising synodality: we are listening to each other, respecting each other, helping each other, and together are committing ourselves."

It's the same attitude that I see developing when mandated volunteers join to enrich pastoral teams and when Pastoral Orientation Councils are set up to exercise co-responsibility. All this comforts and encourages me. These actions bear witness to the fact that a synodal way of doing things is gradually taking root in our Diocesan culture.

The synodal process teaches us that each one of us is essential to the mission. The days of second-rate workers are over. Our journey highlights our common baptismal dignity: this is what makes us partners in fulfilling the common project of evangelization, rather than beneficiaries of the actions of a few.

Quite a lot has been happening in our Church since the start of the day!

I have wanted this day to have a specific aim: to ensure that we are all in sync with the synodal impetus. Taking up the issues raised in our Diocesan and Quebec-wide reflections allows us to see the work that lies ahead.

In the feedback from the morning's workshops, I noted the following:

- Attitudes to be developed :
 - listening,
 - humility,
 - unconditional welcome,
 - not judging, but having judgment.
- Links to build:
 - reaching out to others, to the periphery,
 - develop co-responsibility,
 - respect the complementary nature of different ministries.
- Humanizing the society in which we live:
 - we are a Church at the heart of the world, in the midst of the world,
 - caring for the poor and excluded.
- Becoming welcoming communities
 - make room for young people and newcomers,
 - set up sharing groups.

I would add the need to make room for the Word and prayer in all spheres of our mission.

To go a step further, we now need to enter a period of discernment. Discernment means avoiding confusion and dispersion. When we discern, we seek to see clearly, to clarify our objectives, and to make consistent choices.

I have already set out the question of discernment. We now need to focus on this: **what are the issues, the human realities or the concerns of the local people that should be the priority focus of our pastoral care?**

At this point, of all the issues raised today - all of which are important and necessary - we now need to discern which ones should be put on top of the pile. What should inspire our actions and decisions over the next few years? Where should we invest our human and financial resources?

Many suggestions and recommendations have been collected since the beginning of our process through meetings, consultations and surveys. With all this material, and with today's orientations and reflections, we must now read the luminous intuitions that the Spirit has deposited in the many interventions of our Diocesan faithful.

I am entrusting this work, as a matter of priority and in a synodal manner, to the synodal committee set up as part of our Diocesan process. By listening to and seeking out what God wants for us, the members of this committee will help us to identify the most appropriate ways of bearing witness to the Gospel at the heart of our society, here and now.

There is an old principle that states, "what concerns everyone should be discussed and approved by everyone". In keeping with this wise precept, the committee will submit its proposals not only to the bishop and the Diocesan Leadership Team, but also to you, the members of this assembly. You will understand that I am already convening you to a follow-up meeting next spring: on that occasion, we will receive the fruits of this work and invoke the Spirit to discern the actions to be taken.

In the meantime, I want you to bear two points in mind. The first concerns the challenge of discernment: to choose some possibilities is to give up others. Remember the urgent appeal made by a former bishop at a pastoral day concerning the choices we have to make: Enough said!

In the Gospel, Jesus reminds us that "if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up the cross and follow me." (*Mark 8:34*). There is no faith journey without crosses and renunciations. We need to keep reminding ourselves of this and be aware of it: this may challenge our certainties, upset our habits and take us out of our comfort zones. Above all, it may force us to review our priorities in the light of the Gospel.

Which brings me to my second point: we must never renounce the demands of the Gospel. The synodal approach is not a process of re-engineering Catholicism, nor is it an operation of seduction meant to be fashionable. If we want to respond to the spiritual thirst of our contemporaries, it's because the Gospel urges us to do so. It's because Christ's message of freedom deserves to be known and shared; it's because the Master is sending us out to meet the world.

Synodality is rooted in the plan to bring about the Kingdom and thus transform the world by the sheer force of unconditional love and mercy. This is the objective that Pope Francis recalled at the opening of the synodal assembly in Rome: this meeting should enable us

to "refocus our gaze on God, to be a Church that looks upon humanity with mercy". The choices and decisions we make, must be in the image of a hospitable Church, in the image of the Good Samaritan, a Church that wants to be close to and compassionate towards every person in his or her search for truth and meaning in life.

Let's move forward! Let's forge ahead! Let us renew our Church through the power of the Gospel! It is not a spirit of fear that leads us, but, as Saint Paul said, a spirit of power, love and self-discipline (cf. *2 Tim 1:7*). A Holy Spirit who accompanies us as we discover God's plan for us and our world. God's plan will be revealed and discerned as we learn to open two books and let them challenge each other: the book of life and the book of the Word. The synodal process teaches us to carry out this exercise together. It is together that we must look at what life brings and teaches us; it is together that we must read the Word; it is together that we will dare to make prophetic gestures; it is together that we will continue to build the Church of Christ that is in Saint-Jean-Longueuil.

To achieve this, I'm counting on each and every one of us.



† Claude Hamelin
Bishop of Saint-Jean-Longueuil

In solidarity with the members of the Diocesan Leadership Team:

Jean Roudy Denois, psj, Paul De Leeuw, Josée Lefebvre, Yvon Métras, Francine Vincent

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