

In the post Vatican II Church, many dioceses conducted synods. These assemblies, consisting of elected delegates of the laity, religious and clergy, were characterized by lengthy discussions and debates, movement of motions, drafting of and voting on resolutions on priority areas for implementation.

Pope Francis has called for a three-year synod process, beginning in local dioceses on October 17, 2021, segueing to the regional level, and then to the level of the universal Church (October 2023). What is the difference between the previous synods and the synod process of Pope Francis? Pope Francis understands the synod as a journey in which the People of God walk together to listen to each other and the Holy Spirit. In previous articles I have used the journeys of Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 18:1-15) and the Emmaus Disciples (Luke 24:13-35) as an archetype of the synodal journey, and the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) as examples of the synodal process. Austen Ivereigh, the Papal biographer, is insightful when says, *“We’ll all be on a crash course in synodality from November. [The synodal process is] firstly a process of discernment in a missionary key: its purpose is to invite the Holy Spirit to show the Church how we can better serve the world and evangelise ... Second, it’s consultative, not deliberative: that is, it is designed to assist the bishops and ultimately the Pope ... Third, it is a process of mutual listening whose fruit, hopefully, is greater unity and shared purpose.”*

This premise of this synod journey assumes that the participants know how to listen, are willing to listen, and discover something anew on the journey. Realistically, we know that some participants bring to the journey their own predetermined agenda. Others listen only to what they wish to hear and become numb to matters contrary to their opinions. Some come with an accusatory finger, and others have ulterior motives. Some come with their insecurities, fears and mistrust.

If the synod journey is to bear the anticipated fruits, participants must be honest and aware that we bring to this journey what Carl Jung calls our “shadows” – that part of us that is so deeply unconscious that we experience it as a stranger to us. Jung posits that our first encounter with the shadow is in the form of projection. We reject it in ourselves and identify it in others. In the narrative of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, we witness the shadow in their response to the question of the Risen Christ. He asks, “What are you talking about as you walk along?” and their response is to accuse him of ignorance: “You must be the only person in Jerusalem who does not know about the recent events.” In a word, they are projecting their own ignorance unto the Risen Christ.

How then can the synod journey move ahead fruitfully with our shadows? Carl Jung writes, *“One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness*

*conscious.*” Jung advises an awareness of our own shadows, the consequences of our shadows, and the integration of our shadows in our lives. Once I read a saying that goes, “*that which we deny has control over us, but that which we confess, we have control over it.*” It is the awareness of our “shadows” that is key to a disposition of non-judgmental listening. Jung would say that our “shadows” are not all that bad. It is our unconsciousness of our shadows that is dangerous. Regarding the integration of our shadows, Estelle Frankel writes, “*It can be also be a powerful source of energy and creativity. Once integrated, the shadow enables us to become whole. It is only destructive when it remains unconscious and compensates for an extremely unbalanced conscious attitude.*” In the journey of the Emmaus disciples, towards the end of the conversation with the Risen Christ, they were enlightened on their ignorance or shadow. It is this enlightenment, and not the sterilization of their shadow, that inspired them to exercise hospitality towards Jesus and return to Jerusalem. In a word, they integrated their own shadow, not purged it. Frankel tells us of the fruit of this integration: “*we become more tolerant of ourselves and others. We can more readily approach and make peace with our enemies because we no longer see them as our opposites, as completely ‘others.’*”

The synodal journey, therefore, is not an event, as it is an attitude and spiritual disposition that open us to authentic listening and dialogue. This synodal journey is already occurring at many grassroot levels – WhatsApp and Messenger chats, parishes, offices, neighbourhood, family meetings, and dispute resolution sessions. We now face the current challenge to translates these synod-type journeys to the three-year synod of the Church.