

“All journeys have a secret destination of which the traveller is unaware” (Martin Buber).

In this article, I reflect on the synod process as a journey of the unknown. As with the corona vaccine hesitancy, there is a synod hesitancy towards Pope Francis’ recent announcement of the three-year synod process. In addition to being battle worn, some church leaders are wary of the absence of clear goals. Unlike previous synods such as the New Evangelization (2012), Vocation and Mission of the Family (2015), Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment (2018), or the Pan-Amazon Region (2019), there is no thematic focus except that it is a synod about the People of God journeying together to listen to each other and the Holy Spirit through a process of consultation. The hesitancy is fuelled by an unknown destination.

Have you ever had a hunch or an intuition to pursue a dream? For those who have acted upon this intense intuition to pursue a dream, we know first-hand that it begins with a journey towards an unknown destination. As Estelle Frankel writes, “Our internal GPS, rooted in the innermost recesses of the soul, will guide us to our destination so long as we remain steadfast in our determination.” All great projects and inventions begin with this intense pursuit of a dream, whether it’s Marcus Garvey’s dream for Black people or Martin Luther King’s dream for an equitable society. Following these footpaths, Pope Francis’ synod clarion call is a call to dream. He writes, “What I hear at this moment is similar to what Isaiah hears God saying through him: Come, let us talk this over. Let us dare to dream” (*Let us Dream*). Dreaming for Pope Francis is a way of thinking that opens to the possibility of something new that the Holy Spirit is offering the Church. But to dream of a different future, he insists, “we need to choose fraternity over individualism as the organizing principle” (*Let us Dream*).

The unknown journey of the biblical figures of Abraham and Sarah is an archetype of the Church’s synod journey. Both heard a voice to embark upon a journey to an unknown and unnamed land. It is a call to leave the familiar - homeland, families, culture and habits - for the unfamiliar. Estelle Frankel identifies some key characteristics of their journey. **First**, they must **embark on the journey with faith** because the land to which they are called is uncharted territory. It is not a linear or straightforward journey, but filled with twists and turns. **Second**, their lives are **transformed** in all kinds of unanticipated ways when they step out into the unknown. For example, Abraham and Sarah experienced transformation as a result of the unexpected visit of angels disguised as men, who prophesied about Sarah giving birth to a son (Genesis 18:1-15). **Third**, this unknown journey required the **sacred use of imagination**, “the ability to see things that are not yet visible or manifest.” Abraham and Sarah’s use of sacred imagination was manifested in their hospitality towards these strangers, who paved a path for Abraham to realize that he would become a father whose children would be as many as the stars.

On this unknown synod journey, there is a choice to partner either with fear or faith. Fear stifles the imagination and argues, “Well, we have had previous synods in my diocese and nothing has come out of them. So, I am not hopeful.” Faith allows the Holy Spirit to activate our sacred imagination and respond creatively like Abraham and Sarah. It was St. John XXIII’s sacred imagination that inspired him to convene the Second Vatican Council and withstand opposition by saying, “We feel we must disagree with those prophets of gloom, who are always forecasting disaster, as though the end of the world were at hand.” Prophets of gloom partner with fear; those who dream partner with faith.

As the Church embarks on this unknown journey, we seek inspiration from countless biblical figures who embarked on unknown journeys with faith as their inner companion. Following their examples, we place the gift of faith in our suitcases. Faith will inspire the Church to exercise our sacred imagination in response to the unknown circumstances along the synodal journey. Because it is an unknown journey of faith, the synodal journey will be a pilgrimage guided by spirituality. In the words of Sr. Nathalie Becquart, Under Secretary for the Synod of Bishops, “What is fundamental and certain is that there is no synodality without spirituality because synodality places at its center the fact of walking together with Christ and listening to the Holy Spirit.” Every participant must begin this journey, not with the intention to impose personal ideology, persuade other participants, or shout down opposing views, but to respectfully dialogue. It is in this spirit of dialogue and openness, that the movement of the Holy Spirit reveals the secret destination of the Church.