

**“For this synodal process to be enriching for both the regional and universal Church, a welcoming space must be established to listen to the people’s story”** (*Synod as Storytelling*, Catholic News,   ).

Luke’s story of Christ’s encounter and journey with two disciples (Luke 24: 13-35) is a scriptural model for the synodal journey. A synod is a journey of baptised Christians sharing their stories of salvation and listening in view of discerning the movement of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church. In Luke’s story, we identify four movements: (1) the Risen Christ invites the disciples to tell their story of concern with the question “What were you talking about as you walk along?” (2) the disciples emotionally tell their story, (3) Christ listens to their story, and (4) and then offers them hospitality with a meal. The fruit of this narrative of storytelling and story-listening is a personal and pastoral decision – return to the Jerusalem community and share their story of their encounter with the Risen Christ.

Listening begins with an awareness of what’s happening within me – how am I feeling and thinking and how I rise to become the “best version of myself”. Joan Chittister describes it as becoming “sensitive and aware of our fears and what we’re resisting and . . . hear the call to rise to our true or authentic self” (*Radical Spirit*). Pope Francis refers to it as “decenter” and “transcend,” that is, “See where you are centered, and decenter yourself. The task is to open doors and windows, and move out beyond.” He utilizes the metaphor of a tourist versus a pilgrim. A tourist goes to the sea or mountains for relaxation but returns to a suffocating routine while a pilgrim decenters and comes home a changed person (*Let us Dream*). If we do not listen to our inner fears or anxieties, our biases, and recognize the call to transcend it, we will be unable to listen intently to the story of others. We will find ourselves immediately analysing, based on our programmed and biased mentality, and making false judgments. Therefore, listening begins from within ourselves and our possibilities for growth.

Armed with this interior awareness, we are prepared to listen to what’s happening around us. It’s “. . . an awareness of what is happening within the people around us. It is also an awareness of how what we do and say affect other people” (Matthew Kelly). The greatest enemy of the synodal journey is a mind that works like an automatic car that quickly shifts into the fifth gear of analysis and judgment. The synodal journey requires disengaging the automatic mind and re-engaging the mind to work like manual gears slowly embracing personal awareness that prepares us to move into the gear of appreciating that their stories are the gateway into knowing what’s within them. In the synodal journey of Christ and the Emmaus disciples, Christ became aware of the spiritual and emotional impact of the past on the disciples by listening to their story. Patiently, Christ moved from listening attentively, and teaching and challenging compassionately

A potential roadblock in the path of the synodal journey is the disease of personal and cultural self-centredness. Pope Francis writes that this disease manifests itself in three ways. First, he writes, “Narcissism takes you to the mirror to look at yourself . . . You end up so in love with the image you created that you end up drowning in it.” Second, “discouragement leads

you to lament and complain about everything so that you no longer see what is around you nor what others offer you, only what you think you've lost. Discouragement leads to sadness in the spiritual life . . . Eventually it closes you in on yourself and you can't see anything beyond yourself." Finally, ". . . pessimism, which is like a door you shut on the future and the new things it can hold; a door you refuse to open in case one day there'll be something new on your doorstep." This disease can prevent individuals, parishes and communities from creating a hospitable space that invites others to tell their story, even to listen to what's happening within them and around them. It is only by allowing ourselves to decenter from ourselves that we can create a hospitable space for storytelling and story-listening.

The synodal journey is a hospitable space for stories. Every person, community, diocese, and region are invited to tell and listen to the stories of the "joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted" (*Gaudium et Spes*, #1). Storytelling and story-listening becomes the pathway to discern the story of God's universal salvation.