

In my two previous articles I reflected on two dimensions of the Church's synodal journey as story-telling and story listening. Now I use the metaphor of a stage director to reflect the role of the Holy Spirit in the synodal journey. In any performance, stage actors and actresses are the storytellers, while the audience plays the listening role. The storytellers and the audience are like two sides of a coin. This inseparability is facilitated and managed by a stage director whose role is to create a wholesome, synergistic experience, allowing everyone to leave saying, "Did not our hearts burn within us when . . ."

The Holy Spirit is the director and guide of the mission of the Church and the synodal journey. Luke articulates this belief clearly in his two-volume account, the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. For Luke, the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of Life, initiates the earthly life and mission of Jesus and the mission of the Church. Consequently, Luke writes that Jesus is conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit (1:35); at Mary's visit, Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit (1:41); the Spirit descends upon Jesus like a dove at his baptism (3:22); the Spirit inaugurates Jesus' mission (Luke 4:16), and Jesus hands over the Spirit to the Father upon his death (23:46). In the Acts of the Apostles, the Spirit descends upon Mary and the disciples in the upper room and directs the missionary work of the Early Church.

The story of the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) testifies to the powerful guide of the Holy Spirit in the Church's synodal journey. They assembled to discuss whether Gentile converts to Christianity should undergo the Jewish ritual of circumcision as part of their initiation rite (Acts 15: 2). At this assembly each perspective on the issue was allowed to be articulated. Acts 15: 5 notes the contribution of one group. "Some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, 'The Gentiles must be circumcised and told to obey the Law of Moses.'" In Acts 15:6-11 the assembly listened to the faith story of Peter speaking about witnessing God's universal salvation. Finally, in Acts 15: 12 Paul and Barnabas tell their own story about the miracles and wonders God had performed through them among the Gentiles. Discerning the movement of the Spirit in the discussion, James, the president of the Council declared in the end, "It is my opinion that we should not trouble the Gentiles who are turning to God." (Acts 15:19). This is a scriptural example of what Cardinal Gretch, President of the Synod of Bishops, says, "To the prophetic function of the whole people of God corresponds the pastors' task of discernment: from what the people of God say, the pastors must grasp what the Holy Spirit wants to say to the Church. But it is from listening to the people of God that discernment must begin" (*Interview with Andrea Tornielli*, Vatican News, July 21, 2021).

If the synod journey is to bear succulent spiritual fruits, the process must be characterized by the Council of Jerusalem where everyone, that is the laity, religious, priests and bishops, have a voice. Space ought to be created for persons or groups whose voices are usually not powerful, influential or dominant. Why is it essential to listen to everyone's story? By virtue of our baptism and initiation as members of the Church, we are Spirit-filled and gifted members of the Church. As members, we are on pilgrimage or journey together. Therefore, everyone's story about their experience of the Holy Spirit must be told. Consequently, the

People of God have “a sort of spiritual instinct that enables the believer to judge spontaneously whether a particular teaching or practice is or is not in conformity with the Gospel and with the apostolic faith” (*International Theological Commission*). The Church refers to this “spiritual instinct” as *sensus fidei*. Through the *sensus fidei*, the Holy Spirit enables the People of God to discern the movement of the Spirit in particular circumstances of the Church’s life. To discern the movement of the Spirit, the stories of the People of God must become like individual pieces of puzzle which, when combined, form a universal *sense or instinct* of faith.

So, decisions are not based on a democratic or autocratic process, and we move forward unimprisoned by resolutions, but by relying on a spirit of discernment. In a word, given all these stories, where is the Spirit leading the Church at this moment in time? Having listened to their own story and the Risen Christ’s interpretation of their story, the two disciples on the road to Emmaus discerned that the Spirit was leading them to offer hospitality, and eventually returned to Jerusalem. May we allow the Holy Spirit to be stage director of this synodal journey.