**The Synod – Presentation on key theme of Participation**

This is the first time in the history of the Church that it has invited the entire church – over 1 billion Catholics worldwide - to take part in a two–year process of listening and discernment in the form of a Synod.

In the last two weeks we have heard something of what the Synod is, of our journeying together and the key themes for the synod of **communion, participation** and **mission.** In this, the third of the four reflections, the focus is on **participation**.

The three underpinning themes of the synod make it clear that our faith - being in **communion** with God and each other - is our gift, and our **mission** - sharing that faith and love with others - is our purpose, and **participation** the way in which we act out that purpose and faith.

Through our baptism we are in communion with each other and together we form the church – the people of God. It is what we do, each and every one of us, individually and collectively that gives life to the church. Through our actions we create what people see as the church. We are called to play an active role in that church – to participate as fully as we can.

A reading from St Paul’s letter to the Corinthians which we heard as the second reading a couple of weeks ago referred very directly to this participation, to our involvement in, our service to, the church and thus to each other. St Paul told us that we all have gifts which are different from one to another but they are complementary and benefit us all.

We are already actively participating in our shared Christian life by being here this morning. But the Synod gives us an opportunity to look afresh at what we contribute to that shared life, to the life of the church and to ask ourselves how can we **participate further** in this **‘journeying together’....** this ‘**encounter’?**

Here are a few things we can think about…

* + Through prayer and reflection we can ask the Holy Spirit to show us how we can be actively involved in the life of the parish. We might ask ourselves what individual skills can I offer? How can I contribute?
  + Reflecting on what we have heard can we ask for “discernment” – what does God call each of us, and the whole Church, to do and to be?
  + As part of daily life can we respond to, and create opportunities, for conversations with our families and friends about revitalising the role of the Church in society – from a local parish level to a global level.

Pope Francis has told us that we should aim to *“become experts in the art of encounter*” and that this should be “*not so much by organizing events or theorising about problems, as in taking time to encounter the Lord and one another”.*

We might ask ourselves and each other “What are the challenges? What is our role in supporting the most marginalised in society? How do we respond to the climate crisis? What is the role of women in the church? How can we welcome and listen to young people, gay and lesbian people, homeless people? As Pope Francis asks “*Do we involve them in the life of our community without being hindered, rejected or judged?’* Are we good at listening? What has the pandemic taught us about participation in the life of the Church?

When you get home, please try to make time to read the inserts in the Newsletter which build further on these questions.

A week on Monday, 21st February you are all invited to join prayers for the Synod at St Columba’s Church at 6.30 followed by tea/coffee in the hall.

We want to hear your responses to these and other questions. There are postcards at the back of the church for us to write down our views on the way the Church should be in the future to be posted in the Comments box in the porch.

When we have coffee after Mass, do please discuss what we have heard. There will be a flip chart and Post-Its and another comments box so that we can add views and opinions and ideas.

All of the contributions will be collated and will form part of our Parish’s submission to Bishop Mark. As well as these we may prefer to write to Bishop Mark directly with our opinions - before 1st March. I know that some people have already done so.

Let’s remind ourselves that the purpose of the Synod is not to produce documents but to “*plant dreams, draw out visions, allow hope to flourish, inspire trust, weave together relationships, enlighten our minds, warm our hearts and give strength to our hands….”*

During today’s Gospel we heard the message of hope. This “journeying together” in the Synod is an act of hope and of trust – in God and in each other. To listen humbly and to speak boldly. The Beatitudes remind us to look for those who are blessed (Spirit-filled) in unexpected places: the poor, the hungry, the sorrowful, the hated. Are we seeking out and listening to their voices? Will we commit ourselves and the Church to this?

To finish may I share with you two lines from the Synod Prayer:

‘*Teach us the way we must go and how we are to pursue it’.*

That relates directly to our participation in the Synod and the life of the church in the future.

Thank you for listening and do please come - let us speak and listen to each other - in the hall after mass.

Let us end by standing and praying together the Synod prayer which is printed on your newsletter.