



27th Week of the Year and Pope St John XXIII 8th and 11th October

Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

***“I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father”***

This week we have been made aware in the national media that important events are afloat in Rome. Even in the midst of wall-to-wall coverage of the Conservative Party Conference and the removal of the American Speaker of the House in Washington, the fact that the Synod of Bishops in Rome has got underway has reached the main news – the Blessing of same-sex unions is said to be something the Pope is prepared to consider. If this happens in certain circumstances it will be noteworthy of course, but the International Synod just beginning in Rome and continuing during October this year and again in October 2024 is a very significant event in itself. Those of us who are old enough will remember the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council which was convened by Pope John XXIII 1962 to 1965. Indeed the day it began 11<sup>th</sup> October is marked by the Feast of Pope St John XXIII, the Pope whose joy and hope brought light to the Church and the wider world.

Christopher White and Joshua McElwee in a Newsletter “NCR Online” are covering the Synod and record the opening on 4<sup>th</sup> October in which Pope Francis draws a parallel to the Second Vatican Council which instituted a number of reforms opening up the Church to the modern world: *“It is necessary first of all that the Church should never depart from the sacred patrimony of truth received from the Fathers (quoting Pope St John XXIII) But at the same time she must look to the present, to the new conditions and new forms of life introduced into the modern world which have opened new avenues to the Catholic apostolate”*.

Pope Francis is quoted as saying *“this is the primary task of the Synod: to refocus our gaze on God, to be a Church that looks mercifully at humanity”*. I recalled the image of St Francis that was posted by Christian Art for his Feast. The painting by Francisco de Zurbarán in the National Gallery is of Francis in meditation focusing on the Divine: a wonderful reminder of how much Francis was a picture of Jesus Himself, who drew the power of his teaching and way of life from Prayer to the Father. The Church too looks to her leaders especially at this time to focus on the Divine: *“A Church that has God at its centre, and, therefore, is not divided internally and is never harsh externally”*, the Pope said at the opening Mass.

After a two-year process leading to this moment, which has included listening sessions with Catholics around the globe, Francis charged those gathered at the Mass to look with

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a “welcoming gaze towards the weakest, the suffering and the discarded”. The Pope repeated his frequent refrain that the Synod is not a “parliament” but a place of communal discernment. The presence of lay delegates and women in the procession leading to the opening Mass highlighted an important development since Vatican II – the recognition of the lay vocation, the presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of Families, and of course in Religious Communities too. It is to the benefit of the mission of the Church that all who live the Gospel are listened to.

The Gospel Parable for the 27<sup>th</sup> Sunday is about the Vineyard of the Lord, the Kingdom of God, an image for the Church. We each have a part of it to look after and produce its fruit. In his book “Seeds for the Soul” (Sunday Homilies) Father McGuire concludes his reflection saying: *“This week, may we look at the gardens of our lives and not only make sure there are no weeds but ensure there is some good fruit growing as well”*.

I am writing this on the Feast of St Faustina, the Apostle of Divine Mercy: I spoke at Mass about the impact of her Apostolate especially on the Church as a dispenser of God’s love and mercy. How are Pope Francis and the Bishops of the Church to uphold Church teaching on high moral ideals and at the same time embrace in mercy those who fall short of the ideal? The tensions in this area are there for all to see: they are the issues that fascinate the wider world!

We look to the Synod to produce guidelines that will safeguard the truths of our Faith Tradition while continuing to gather into the fold those who fall short. The Church is for all – “tutti, tutti, tutti” as Pope Francis has said.

We pray in these days for the guidance of the Holy Spirit as the Synod discusses the great themes of communion, participation and mission; so important for evangelisation, the heart of the vocation of all in the Church.

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