

Journeying Together: The Synoptic Ideal of Synodality in the Infancy Narrative According to Mathew and Luke

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Abstract

Synodality is embracing the concept of togetherness and confidently living together. It reminds us about our right and duty to proclaim the Good News to the whole world and the world's right to be announced and received. As the synodal identity is shaped by divine assistance, it is necessary to inspect the various areas where Synodality is understood in. The article reflects on the Apostolic Constitutions and various documents by Pope Francis, and understand Synodality in its light.

Keywords: Synodal Identity, Divine Assistance, Communion, Eucharistia

Introduction

To feel much for others and little for ourselves; to restrain our selfishness and exercise our benevolent affections constitute the perfection of human nature. However exquisitely human nature may have been described by writers, the true practical system can be learned only in the world. Walking together enriches the experience of our social life. The first living expression that one belongs to a community, a congregation, or a race is “journeying together.” Walking together necessitates awareness of our co-existence with others. *Noblesse oblige* means “nobility obliges”; the moral obligation of those of high birth, powerful social position, etc., to act with honor, kindness, generosity,

etc.; privilege entails responsibility. We are all naturally gregarious and are born with the herd instinct. We have no inherent prejudices against any race, colour or creed when we are born. We like everyone – until our elders put blinders on our gregarious feet. This awareness comes to us not by our initiative alone but by our intrinsic inclination. Most organisms have a sense of “being together and journeying together”, not exclusively restricted to human beings, animal kingdoms, or living organisms but also non-living organisms. The land in a particular area has the same feature of the soil, collection of stones, formation of rock, nature of climate, group of minerals, etc. It has a spirit of “existing together.” It is an example of “journeying together” or co-existence. If they have no “togetherness,” they can’t just survive there. It may be the very root of Synodality. Living together necessitates a sense of “journeying together.” It means synodality is not restricted to a particular religion, system, or living beings but exists in the universe. Synodality is embracing the concept of togetherness and confidently living together. “When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up. / If anyone speaks in a tongue, let there be only two or at most three, and each in turn; and let one interpret... Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said.” (1Cor 14:26-29).

Synodality indicates the meaning of fraternal cooperation and familial bond. Also, it functions as a glue, discernment assembly, convergence finding acquaintance, and communion-based spiritual journey. It deeply constitutes and participates in the “journey together” to the ultimate goal, life-giving involvement in the Church’s mission, and coming together to proclaim the word of God as the result of togetherness. “The teaching of Scripture and Tradition show that Synodality is an essential dimension of the Church” (Pope Francis, 2018). The final and most vital Holy Grail is that those who believe in Jesus think together to proclaim the Word of God. Synodality culminates in giving Christ Jesus to the whole world. The Church expects each member to participate in her mission with one heart and soul. “The mission of the Church requires the entire People of God to be on a journey together, with each member playing his or her crucial role, united with each other” (Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, 2021). Therefore synodality invites the daughters and sons of the Church to leave their petty differences behind and make the onward journey to fulfill the Church’s mission. Synodality reminds us about our right and duty to proclaim the Good News to the whole world and the world’s right to be announced and received.

The history of the Church is the history of synodality. The public ministry of our Lord gives us an idea of how synodality was employed when he called Peter and others. Jesus could have done his ministry as many prophets did in the Old Testament, leading the Israelites single-handedly. But Jesus, on the other hand, was eager enough to have a group of people with him. Therefore, he called Peter and others individually from different life contexts. It had a synodal form of progress, and we see that under the leadership of Jesus, the disciples moved to the villages and preached the Kingdom of God. “Synodality is not simply a working procedure, but the particular form in which the Church lives and operates” (Pope Francis, 2018). It is fascinating that when the disciples returned, they all came together and briefed what happened where they preached. When they explained their experiences, we see they were ecstatic about what they did for the people. Jesus told them not to be joyful about what happened there but be happy that their names were inscribed in heaven. It is what we mean by synodality in the Church. Whenever togetherness was lacking in the Church’s history, she went away from the fundamentals of Jesus’ teachings. The synods and councils mean fostering oneness in the Church. Whenever the church fathers sensed the need for more exuberant unity in the Church, the Spirit of the Lord inspired them to call for synods and councils.

The Holy family in the Gospels of Mathew 1:18-2:23 and Luke 2:1-52 is the best model of synodality in the Church. Matthean and Lukan’s narratives of the birth of Jesus highlight how the members of a loving community could accompany one another and support them to attain the goal without missing the essence. As you work toward that goal, remember the maxim “Good habits are hard to break” and hence consistently practice. The primary virtue inscribed in the infancy narratives of Matthew and Luke is that the holy family had a single-minded objective to fulfill that entrusted to them by the angel. They gave up their comforts for the principal cause: to protect Jesus. Mary and Joseph had never catered to individual interests but waited, discerned, acted, and fulfilled everything the Spirit of the Lord conveyed to them. The uniqueness is that Mary and Joseph did everything for Jesus making their lives vulnerable. However, they were guided by the messengers of God. Evangelists Matthew and Luke tell us how God’s guidance directs both Mary and Joseph and how their unconditional obedience to the inspirations, signs, and pieces of information pave the way for the best. The Holy Family became part of a life-giving community journeying together with many other families to a goal set to fulfill the will of God.

Evolution of Basic Synodal Identity

The Gospel of Matthew and Luke narrates the engagement of Mary and Joseph (Luke 1:27, Matthew 1:18). It began a new and close affiliation between the two members. Naturally, there started a connection between the two families. A family is the microcosmic epitome of the Church and is known as a domestic Church. “The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion; for this reason, it can and should be called a *domestic Church*. “It is a community of faith, hope, and charity; it assumes singular importance in the Church as is evident in the New Testament. Its members are persons equal in dignity. For the common good of its members of society, the family has various responsibilities, rights, and duties” (Pope John Paul II, 1992, 2203-2204; Pope John Paul II, 1981, 21). It consists of many people of the same culture and the same sensitivity. It is considered a well-knit unit or a synod in miniature. A group of people gathering means they have a particular goal, vision, way of life, and, above all, a point of convergence. Once two people marry, they come together and choose to journey together and live together. The idea of synodality is perceived in its whole nature. They come together, understand, live and journey toward their ultimate goal. “The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. It is called to partake of the prayer and sacrifice of Christ. The Christian family has an evangelizing and missionary task. The relationships within the family bring an affinity of feelings, affections, and interests, arising above all from the members’ respect for one another” (Pope John Paul II, 1992, 2205-2206). Therefore, we can say that married life is a perfect form of synodality. Two families come together and see the common good through the life of those two engaged.

The fathers of the Church envisage synodality as inspired by the divine intervention to come, reflect, plan and commit together to living sincerely in our faith. Synodality may be seen as an earnest, solemn expression of a relationship between two persons who decided to be engaged, as in Mary and Joseph. According to St Paul, this is what we see in the relationship between Jesus and the Church. Synodality is not a get-together or a short-term commitment but a deep-rooted well-entrenched longing for the institution and its *raison d’etre* as in family life. A microcosmic vision of synodality is mentioned in Mathew and Luke.

Synodality Shaped by Divine Assistance

Meanwhile, the Holy Spirit, a third party, joins Mary, Joseph, and their families. It is crystal clear to them that the Spirit is present among them. “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:19–20). This relationship between Mary, Joseph and their families came to the point of “journeying together” through marriage. It is a natural way of getting into a synodality with a joint family solidarity programme. But with the arrival of the Spirit of God, there was a total transformation in their life. It was to Joseph, according to Mathew, through a dream, and according to Luke, to Mary through the angel in person. The angel is the messenger or representative of God, and he conveys to Mary that she is going to bear a son by the power of the Holy Spirit. The angel Gabriel, Mary and Joseph make a community in that they walk together, relying on one another to fulfil the will of God. They were gathered together to live up to the divine revelation. In a spirit-filled Christian family, the centre of ‘synodality’ is not human but the divine. “The Christian family is a communion of persons, a sign and image of the communion of the Father and the Son in the Holy Spirit. ... The Christian family has an evangelising and missionary task” (Pope John Paul II, 1992, 2205). It is easy for us to reflect on synodality in Christian “marriage.”

Synodality points to a reality that many come together to discuss existing situations, discern truth, decide to follow the right way, and dedicate themselves to living what is seen right through divine inspiration.

“Synodal dialogue depends on courage both in speaking and in listening. It is not about engaging in a debate where one speaker tries to get the better of the others or counters their positions with brusque arguments, but about expressing whatever seems to have been suggested by the Holy Spirit as useful for communal discernment, at the same time being open to accepting whatever has been suggested by the same Spirit in other people’s positions, “for the general good”” (Pope Francis, 2018).

It helps them move forward with specific goals and fundamental duties. The Spirit of the Lord is the Spirit that takes the initiative for members to make a “journey together”. “The human person participates in the light and power of the divine Spirit. By his reason, he is capable of understanding the order of things established by the creator. By free will, he is capable of directing himself toward his true good. He finds his perfection ‘in seeking and loving what is true and good’” (Pope John Paul II, 1992, 1704). Therefore, it ensures that the “journey together”

is led not by the will of members gathered together but by the will of the Holy Spirit. According to Matthew, Joseph confirmed God's will, accepting God's divine sign, and in Luke, the angel directly confirms the Spirit's intervention and presence with them. Any endeavour by a Christian has to be confirmed, invoking and ensuring the presence of the Holy Spirit, which is essential to continue the mission effectively. That is why we read in the Acts of the Apostles that Gamaliel tells his community, "So in the present case, I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; because if this plan or this undertaking is of human origin, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them – in that case, you may even be found fighting against God!" (Acts 5:38-39). Synodality seeks the presence and leadership of the divine. We see the divine presence in the 'Holy Family' from the very moment of the appearance of the angel Gabriel to Mary.

Synodality is Going Together and Growing Together

Synodality should not be seen merely in human terms, that is, with human pedagogy and its achievements. Achievement is often understood in terms of competition, subdual and survival. It ignores the means but considers only the end. Many believe that competition and achievement are the ends of life and that any means to achieve is acceptable and justified. Synodality is based on values taught by Jesus in the Gospels.

Apparently, Joseph and Mary went through many difficulties in the birth of Jesus. For Joseph, his Jewish conscience was against accepting Mary as his spouse, but he got through it successfully.

"He saw the pregnant Mary, not from the perspective of law that the Israelites practised and meticulously followed from the time of Moses but the divine law of compassion that made them the covenant people of Yahweh. He could have chosen the law to save his face and the community's conventions, which would have been a mark of exemplary religious commitment. There were solid and apparent regulations to put Mary mercilessly in trouble as she was seen pregnant (Deuteronomy 22:23) before getting married. Before the law, Mary was a serious offender. But Joseph opted for compassion which is the sign of righteousness" (Puthumattathil & Kochappilly, 2022, p. 197).

It shows that Joseph had the presence of the Spirit of God and thought beyond the boundaries the religion sketched through law. With the word 'justice' used negatively, he could have shut the door on Mary and be

free. But Joseph uses ‘justice’ affirmatively to Mary’s advantage, and Mary is secure in the strong hands of this carpenter from Nazareth. So orthodox and legalistic a community could even ostracise him as his. But Joseph, by no means, would want to disgrace Mary in public.

Synodality always thinks, as much as possible, of not imposing things on others while making decisions, considering everyone as an instrument of the Holy Spirit. If we go through the history of Councils, we understand that all participants have been highly regarded. The Synod means unity, not division. It is the quintessence of Jesus’ teaching. Synodality is the two extended hands to hold all those who have goodwill to meditate, propose, receive and commit to the principal cause. All are to be heard in order to discern the best under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The most noticed virtue of Joseph is that he did not want a woman to suffer because of him; he prudently and tactfully turned everything to her advantage. Is it not the essence of synodality? There will be a diversity of opinions in the Synod, but the persons filled with the Spirit of the Lord could quickly come to the point of unanimity for the common good of the Church. The synodality begins when all united in the Spirit, walk with Jesus to the destination, heavenly Jerusalem. Synodality puts its goal as unanimity, union and communion despite all differences in culture, individuality, traditions and all other bindings. A perfect ‘journeying together’ expects sacrifice for the sake of the common goal.

Justice is the foundation of synodality. Joseph maintained justice as he had thought of leaving Mary alone without publicizing it. He had no other option except to dismiss her secretly. Joseph, one who observed the law to the core, felt bound to divorce Mary. For him, the possibilities were many. He could either summon her to be judicially condemned and punished or put her away by a bill of divorcement before witnesses, but without assigning cause, which is the more merciful course Joseph resolved to adopt (Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, n.d.). For his part, this was a harmless act that could do for the good of Mary (Cf. Deuteronomy 22:28). Sometimes, in synodality, there will be difficult moments to discern, determine, and demand. They must find ways and means to overcome it with the right Spirit of unity. However, justice must be implemented rather than compromised for convenience. Compromise always has a dark face of injustice, damaging the joy of “journeying together”. Synodality aspires to think together to make the journey happy.

Synodality is the Communion of Hearts

Matthew and Luke enumerate one of the essential features of Synodality. “In the time of Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, asking, ‘Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews?’” (Matthew 2:1-2) “So the [shepherds] went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger” (Luke 2:16). Seeking truth is the essence of Synodality. The wise men visited the child to pay homage because, through wisdom, one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, they realised the birth of Jesus. On the other hand, the shepherds visited the Holy Family because of the divine intervention that the angel appeared to them and explained the importance of the event. The divine intervention is a characteristic of Synodality.

Synodality is the call to expose ourselves to the truth. All can have flashes of truth; the challenge is identifying the truth. Eternal truth is not limited to persons, places, cultures, or religious beliefs but is the gift of divine wisdom. As long as the Spirit of the Lord is present in synodality, one can see the divine element indwelling. The visit of the wise men and the shepherds shows that the divine brilliance worked in them, and they searched for Jesus, the true star from heaven. Synodality always seeks God’s will through the Inspiration of the Holy Spirit. After Jesus’ resurrection, the Holy Spirit came upon the Apostles and Mary, who were gathered in the upper room where the concept of synodality materialised. They all thought of only one point: the risen Lord.

In synodality, all come to the point of the Church’s mission and reflect on how to implement it. “A synodal Church walks forward in communion to pursue a common mission through the participation of each and every one of her members” (Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, 2021). The resource may come from any corner, as in the example of the wise men and the shepherds who did not know the Holy family, but the divine intervention made them come to the manger. Synodality calls all for coming together to have oneness and journeying together. The Church is catholic, and all members have participatory responsibilities and lawful rights obtained by the sacrament of Baptism. Therefore, Synodality has the universal and catholic characteristic of seeking the truth, participating in the process of finding it, sincerely following it and continuing to hand over it with utmost enthusiasm. We see this vocabulary of commitment in the life of the wise men and the shepherds who visited the Holy Family.

Synodality: Openness to the Promptings of the Spirit

Insight, or the nucleus of a vision, comes not from all but a single source. The merit of Synodality is the readiness and genuineness to share insights for the sake of a common cause. Synodality primarily intends to gather inspiration relevant to the situation. Such contributions must be received and promoted well, notwithstanding personal or mean feelings of egoistic-centred and emotional circumstances of thoughts. It is a reality that sometimes the goal becomes the victim of some tactful and misleading members or groups who, crooked as they are, will undoubtedly hijack and damage the promptings of Spirit to show off their prominence. It happens because the Spirit of synodality is not well received through the Spirit of the Lord.

Interventions from heaven, through dreams, guided Joseph. “When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife... (Matthew 1:24)”. “Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod.”... “Get up, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who were seeking the child’s life are dead. ... Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother, and went to the land of Israel” (Matthew 2:14,19,21). Joseph was ready to do the will of God. He had faith in the divine intervention that would control his destiny. That was why he could immediately respond to the “revelation” of the angel. He was disposed to follow the sign from heaven. The prerequisite of the success of Synodality is the readiness to respond reverentially even to the slightest insights that come from the unexpected milieu of divine and human life. Significant historical changes point to a single component that the leaders patiently meditated on challenging phenomena of the time and their demands. Accordingly, they were committed to browsing the need of time and responding aptly. They were neither too early nor late to respond to the challenges and demands before them. Therefore, their interactions with reality became milestones in history. The actively involved persons in the infancy narrative responded to their inspirations immediately so that they could do justice to the divine call. One of the challenges of synodality is the immediate and mature interaction with the needs of the concerned community, which gives a compelling, advanced and proper outcome. Synodality is an effective instrument for observing, finding, analysing and communicating truth for the benefit of the concerned community.

Matthew exposes a vital characteristic of the Holy Family, presenting Joseph as the one who took the initiative for ‘journeying together.’ The central figure of the narrative explained in Matthew in connection with childbirth is Mary, who bore the child. However, Joseph kept every sequence entirely in control for the safety of both Mary and child Jesus. The true face of synodality has its backing in the infancy episodes. Sometimes, insignificant and feeble voices create momentum in the synodal body, which causes the entire ‘journey’ to be vibrant and revolutionary. What requires in synodality is unconditional trust in the work of the Holy Spirit and openness even to the slightest of inspirations from everyone so that through prayer and promptness, the best of it comes to the fore for effectiveness. The wise men also highlight this characteristic of synodality, the willingness to accept what they confirmed by the star’s position. “When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising until it stopped over the place where the child was” (Matthew 2:9-10). The Spirit of the Lord inspired them to get away from the King, and they became the instrument to save the child Jesus from death. Synodality always looks for the good, and all the members primarily admit the pre-eminence of divine intervention as the Holy Spirit leads their journey.

Synodality: Longing for Communion

The ambiance and the Spirit of synodality invite unity among the believers. Any divided institution, especially religious, is no more considered a growing one but an unhealthy one that moves toward an evil destiny. That is why the Church calls for unity through collective discussion, highlighting essential converging points for effective results. Synodality focuses on a ‘family reunion.’ In it, the ideological differences are meticulously converted into a means of togetherness and growth. It is logical and natural that the development process has to go through different segments of human life, which may not be identical all over the Church. The scope of synodality visualizes this process, and the Church will readily face new challenges arising by proposing appropriate discernments for the time and maintaining her age-old traditions. Here unity is the basis of all discussions and plans. “Exercising synodality makes real the human person’s call to live communion, which comes about through sincere self-giving, union with God and unity with our brothers in Christ” (Pope Francis, 2018).

Synodality envisages going back to original unity but accepting the existing situations. A clear indication of longing for a ‘family reunion’ of the Holy Family is perceived in their journey back to Israel, the motherland. This unity-oriented journey was essential to the Holy Family because the mission of Jesus had to begin there. The Israelite mind always longed to reach back to their lost nation. That is why they enthusiastically returned in no time when modern Israel was founded. Unity is part of the Israelites’ spiritual identity. History reveals that they had no peace without reaching out to their forefathers in the land of Israel, which had been given to Moses by Yahweh. We see the same thought pattern in many places in the Old Testament. “Then he (Jacob) charged them, saying to them, ‘I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my ancestors... They carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field at Machpelah.” (Genesis 49:29-50:13). Their journey had a synodal face of unity that is physical, spiritual and psychological. The Holy Family returned to Israel as they longed to have this family reunion with the Israelite community.

The culmination of synodality is unity in the Church by maintaining harmony between the past and the present. It also aims at handing over the components of Christian living to the future with utmost dignity. Synod has to help the Church to continue her faith practised in the past with insights. The Synod also prepares the ‘balance sheet’ for the one who commissioned the Church to proclaim the Word of God. It is possible only when we are open to walking with the past and future. Synod prepares a way to this end, and we must move to the ‘new Nazareth’ as the Holy Family “journeyed together” to Nazareth.

Synodality: Guided by Divine Light

Since synodality is a communion of love and understanding, sharing and evaluation, and deciding and dedicating, it needs supernatural leadership. The Spirit of the Lord is the head of this communion. From this source, all get the power and inspiration to proceed with the journey. ‘Synod refers to an assembly convoked by some legitimate authority’(Pope Francis, 2018). The legitimate authority of the Synod is not human authority but the Spirit of the Lord. The Synod’s progress depends on the trust one has in the process of participation. It is not the trust in human involvement and exceptional excellence of managerial proceedings but divine intervention throughout the journey. Human proceedings have limitations, and the Church entirely depends on divine interventions despite all human considerations.

The Church ensures that before every Synod, she has a due spiritual preparation involving all her children. The journey will be meaningful, effective and fruitful only when it is made real through the Trinitarian presence of God.

We see the first face of synodality in the presence of the angel Gabriel. “The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth” (Luke 1:26). The angel announced the surety of the divine participation in the birth of Jesus, and later, more details were given to Mary. It gave her confidence, and Gabriel clarified her doubts with the example of her kinswoman Elizabeth. One of the objectives of Synodality is to build trust in the community by discussing relevant topics, getting some good examples, and reminding the ways of non-conformities. Mary clarifies her doubt regarding the birth of Jesus considering human logic, but the angel gives the divine reasoning that mattered to Mary. Human intellect sometimes cannot follow certain things which may be clarified through divine interventions. “For the Synod Fathers, we ask the Holy Spirit first of all for the gift of listening: to listen to God, that with him we may hear the cry of the people; to listen to the people until breathing in the desire to which God calls us” (Pope Francis, 1965). The challenge of the Synod is not decision-making but finding the divine will in the decision-making process.

Synodality Promotes the Sharing of Inspiration

Luke details the angel’s communication to Mary on the divine plan (Luke 1:28-37). Everything was mentioned in this episode and was well-articulated with clarity in communication. We see a greeting at the beginning of the episode, progressing step by step. The greeting follows with a blessing, a reminder to Mary of God’s presence in her. She was perplexed by seeing the angel, but the angel himself pacified her. Then the angel mentioned the birth of Jesus, making Mary more perplexed as a young woman who had no relation with a man. Then, we see a kind of ‘doubt-clarifying session’ between Mary and the angel on human and divine realities. Both reasons and counter reasons are valid according to the situations of both parties. Finally, Mary submits herself to the divine plan accepting human procedures as inferior to the divine proposals.

The episode has a methodology of gaining confidence, proposing, listening, expressing doubts, arguments, counter-arguments, explaining the logic of the proposal, clarifications, and finally, committing

oneself wholly to the divine plan (Kochalumkal, 2013). Discussions, clarifications, recommendations and doubts are integral to growth. Umpteen examples are there of such situations in the Old Testament. Moses was reluctant and unconvinced to carry the responsibilities God wanted for him. He showed his apprehensions, but God clarified everything in lucid detail, and at last, he bowed before the will of God. Prophets also clarified things with God before accepting their responsibilities, or even God took the initiative to expound on what they had to do and about the risks. We see this prophetic line in Mary too.

As discussed above, the Spirit of synodality appears to be very proximate to the Gabriel-Mary episode on the birth of Jesus. The communication procedure between the Angel and Mary is evident in the methodology of the Synod. Discussions and clarification, doubt and solutions, apprehensions and hopefulness are part of a genuine and judicious community. No one imposes anything in the Synod, but convictions lead all of them to move to the final decision. The Church expects from the synod “formation for the spirituality of communion and the practices of listening, dialogue and communal discernment; its relevance for the ecumenical journey and for prophetic *diakonia* in building a social ethos based on fraternity, solidarity and inclusion” (Pope Francis, 2018). Synodality presupposes the clarity of ‘roadmaps’ planned through divine and human interactions because “journeying together” is the sign of unity where “heart speaks unto heart.”¹ Frankness and openness to share and accept, give and receive are imperative to the success of Synodality. It is possible only “... by means of sincere, serene and objective dialogue with our brothers and sisters; by paying attention to the real experiences and challenges of every community and every situation; in the exchange of gifts and the convergence of all energies in view of building up the Body of Christ and proclaiming the Gospel; in the melting-pot of feelings and thoughts that enable us to understand the Lord’s will; by searching to be set free by the Gospel from any obstacle that might weaken our openness to the Spirit” (Pope Francis, 2018). The whole focus of the Synod and its synodality is emblazoned and highlighted here.

¹ (John Henry Cardinal Newman (1801–1890) chose “heart speaks unto heart” as the motto to go on his coat of arms when he became a Cardinal in 1879. At the time, Newman thought these words came from the Imitation of Christ (written in the 1400s), but in fact he was mistaken – they’re from St. Francis de Sales (1567–1622), a French Bishop and great spiritual writer whom Newman revered.)

Synodality Stands for Noble Causes

Good things always have a transformative culmination. Negative energy, thoughts and activities have a destructive result, making our life and others' hard because wickedness and destruction are its striving force. Goodness searches for good, and evil merges with evil in its extreme form. The characteristic of Synodality is the search for peace, unity and love. They are indispensable components of synodality. It hopes to solve problems, not through wickedness but through the Christian values that Jesus taught us. Whenever the Church went away from such virtues, it had to undergo painful moments. Synodality looks forward to cultivating forgiving and compassionate love. In fact, we aim at the teaching of Jesus, not human intelligence or ways. We try to maintain noble causes that demand a life of happiness.

Synodality aims at going about doing benevolence to humanity. The blessings we receive are not for us alone but to grow and to be extended to all. Mary was filled with grace, and her mission started at that moment, and she moved to Judea to visit Elisabeth, who had been pregnant for six months. Mary was carrying the one who would be committed fully to proclaiming the will of his Father. Synodality is nothing but carrying and having the essence of our faith. Mary made momentum in Elisabeth and her child at the very moment of her presence. The child recognised the presence of God in the Trinitarian form, and "the child leapt in her womb" (Luke 1:41). Elisabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit by seeing Mary. As the episode progresses, we realise that the Holy Spirit has gifted Elizabeth the qualities of a prophetess. Synodality targets at the good of the neighbour, not the victory over them. Synodality functions like a molecule that diffuses and carries the matter's quality. Synodality transmits the molecule of God's love to those with goodness in their hearts. The purpose of the Synod is to do good for others.

Synodality is 'Eucharistia'

The Church is the bride of Jesus and the temple of the Holy Spirit. Her primary emotion is joy, as in the union of a bride and her bridegroom, because of her commitment to the bridegroom. The joy of following Jesus is the primary characteristic of the Church. The Church must be an instrument of happiness to all her children so that humanity will come to know that she is the bride of Christ (John 13:35). Synodality aims at the joy of the Church's mission of evangelization and is committed

to communicating that joy to people of God. That is what we mean by mission. Synodality is one of the organs to discern and get back the reality of joy by following the teaching of Christ. But unfortunately, plenty are occasions of shortcomings from the bride, and sometimes she betrays the bridegroom through her improper lifestyle and manners that go much with evil tendencies.

The Church is a community of thanksgiving primarily through the Eucharistic celebration. The Eucharistic celebration is the summit of joy and thanksgiving we render to the Trinitarian God for unconditional love for humanity. Synodality promotes the community to become a community of thanksgiving, as in the life of Mary. Mary's song of praise is the praise of thanksgiving. She enumerates nothingness of her life without the grace of God. Hannah had been humiliated for not having a child, so she prayed to the Lord. "In due time Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel" (1 Samuel 1:12-18). Hannah praises God and pours out a thanksgiving melody of joy and her indebtedness to the Lord for the gift of Samuel. The content and sense of Mary's song were the same as Hannah's prayer. Her song of praise is a thanksgiving to the heavenly Father for the gift she received.

Her soul magnified the Lord because the Messiah came to the world through her womb. What joy could Mary expect more than this? The song of praise, the delight of a specially privileged one, came out from her mouth. Like Mary, we are all privileged to have Jesus as our saviour. We thank God for it by following his teachings. The Synod comprises representatives of all who follow Jesus worldwide; through it, the Spirit of discernment and wisdom works. The Synod glorifies the Trinitarian God for the gift of the Church. "The synodal life of the Church comes about thanks to the implementation of genuine communication of faith, life and missionary commitment among all its members. It gives expression to the *communio sanctorum* which lives from prayer, is nourished by the Sacraments, flourishes in love of each other and of everyone, grow by sharing the joys and trials of the Bride of Christ" (Pope Francis, 2018). Thanksgiving is part and parcel of the synodality of the Church because it becomes effective only through prayer. Prayer is nothing but thanksgiving at its very core.

Synodality: The Proof of Catholicity

Synodality has a universal perspective. The term synodality contains the act of "coming together" and "going together" characteristics. A

single person never makes a synodal prospect, but it dwells in those who come together for the Church and the people of God. The ideas that individual persons are meditated, communicated, assimilated, and transmitted to the community worldwide make a synod meaningful. Although personal opinions and observations project the facts of the existing situations universally or locally, they will not be part of synodal outcomes if they do not reflect them well in the Synod. Emerging thoughts of individuals in the Synod must be dynamic and convinced by the concerned people. All have space in the synod procedure and synodality as we understand it. It means synodality conceives all who follow Jesus. Synodality is not simply a meeting or an event. Instead, it is a deliberately formed “space” where the entire people of God have the right and responsibility to share their own experience of the Church, speak of their hopes and dreams, and offer concerns, anxieties and questions regarding the Church. Thus, a Synod is a process, not a single event. It is the Church journeying together to seek the will of the Holy Spirit.

We see this collective enterprise of the Spirit of synodality in the Matthean and Luken narratives of the infancy of Jesus. People of different cultures, statuses, tastes and even the heavenly reality, an angel comes and becomes part of the “journeying together” in the narratives. It includes the wise men from Orient and the shepherds from the neighbourhood. Coming together is an essential dimension of synodality. Coming together and journeying together have a prominent place in the infancy episodes. Synodality promotes the same Spirit of togetherness to have transforming results in the Church so that all may see and experience Jesus. All who travelled to the Holy Family had a single-minded goal: seeing Jesus.

Synodality: Saying a Big ‘Amen’ to the Almighty

The culmination of the Christian life is complete dedication and faith in Jesus Christ. We have been experiencing God the Father and the Holy Spirit through Jesus, the way and the truth. “An irrefutable fact is that no other spirituality gives Christians such a deep God experience because our faith is deepened in our relationship with God through Jesus Christ” (Kochalumkal, 2001). Total dedication to the Trinitarian God is possible for us only through Jesus because the way to the Father and the power of the Holy Spirit are with him who sacrificed life for the salvation of humankind.

Synodality is the expression of the Christians that we completely trust in the providence of God. Our trust in the unity of Synod is not because we depend on human competence but because we are sure that only the Spirit of the living God can lead us to the right path through Synod. All human endeavours initiated by the Church in the past without trusting in God made nothing effective but destroyed her nicety and Spirit. The Son of God became a human being and showed us the meaning of complete trust in God the Father. The night Jesus prayed on the mountain gives us an excellent example of his relationship with the Father. When he suffered in the Gethsemane Garden, he prayed to the Lord, but he accepted the will of the Father, which shows us his complete dependency on the Father.

Joseph and Mary presented Jesus to the Lord as it was written in the law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord”, and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons” (Luke 2:22-24). Our success is the gift of God. Jesus was the gift of God, the Father, to Joseph and Mary. They acknowledged it by presenting him to the Lord, following the religious law. Synodality depends entirely on the Trinitarian God, giving ourselves to the Holy Spirit to guide the whole Church. By and large, the Spirit of synodality is to present ourselves to the Holy Spirit as an offering. The things that happen in the Synod are not for individual gains but to accomplish the will of God. Through discussions and discernment, we accept that the Synod is the external expression of the whole Church that belongs to the Trinitarian God. Our human initiatives and practices are “a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.” The offerings to God are the visible signs that tell God, “we trust in you”. Synod and synodality are the offerings in which we disown entirely our initiatives but accept that we are instruments to work for the divine scheme. It is what we see in the presentation of Jesus by his parents.

Synodality Anticipates Prudence as of the Wise Men

The wise men were meticulously sagacious in their assessment and findings of their contact with King Herod. They prudently solved dangers encountered while searching for “the King of Jews”. King Herod was challenged by the intention of the wise men’s visit; therefore, he scheduled to trap them. We read, “then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared. Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and

search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage” (Matthew 2:7-8). By knowing the wickedness of the King through a dream, they left for their country on another road. Through the Synod and synodality, the participants perceive the practical ways to implement what they discern for the whole Church. Sometimes the evil ambience causes the possibility of straying from the Spirit of the Synod’s goal. Therefore, proper discernment and prayerfulness are prerequisites of the function of the Synod. The participants can expect the *Herodian complex* in the progress of the Synod. The Synod’s primary challenge is finding and eliminating the evil force that blocks the Church’s mission.

Synodality calls for the virtues of conviction and truthfulness; it must remain far from the temptations to appease the evil forces in the community and the extended community. The wise men uncompromisingly avoided Herod, realising the dangers from him, though it was highly daring an act to elude him. “And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road” (Matthew 2:12).

The Church had endured difficulties and persecution for not compromising with external forces that eventually wanted to penetrate the Church to control and benefit from her. King Herod represented evil and fattened his selfish motives to keep his power unshaken. Unless the fathers of the Synod are vigilant of evil forces and use weapons of prayer and spiritual discernment throughout the Synod’s progress, they cannot achieve what the Synod expects.

The existence of Synodality is deeply rooted in the virtues of tolerance, trust, openness and respect for one another. These virtues must “journey together” to the grassroots level of the Church through the Synod and synodality. A severe challenge always gazes at the Synod to pinpoint the Church’s commitment, merits, hopes, scope, shortcomings, responsibilities and renewal for a better future. The Church must be a source of spiritual energy to the world through her best examples.

Conclusion

Mary willingly said “yes” to the will of God at the end of the announcement of the birth of Jesus. It was a consummate commitment to the cause of humanity. Commitment to what one believes is a matter of joy forever. Though not entirely, she had a clear idea of the implications of her readiness to become the mother of the Messiah.

The Gospels narrate her life, where she kept many things in her heart because she could not understand the divine pedagogy. But she never questioned what happened in her life. She remained strong in her commitment to follow the promptings of Holy Spirit. Joseph solved his complex problem by paying unconditional attention to divine intervention; as a result, he could settle the matter with trust in God and respect for Mary (Matthew 1:18-25). Therefore, they became integrated with God, society and themselves. It is possible only when one ultimately surrenders to the will of God. The Synod in the Church must be committed to doing what the Spirit of the Lord expects from her. Discerning the will of the Holy Spirit depends on our disposition to spend time with the Lord. “Discernment must be carried out in a space of prayer, meditation, reflection and study, which we need to hear the voice of the Spirit” (Pope Francis, 2018).

Synodality does not always promise a peaceful atmosphere and outcome, but it has challenges and difficulties to face. The commitment to truth provides us joy. *Yes to the Lord*, uttered by Blessed Virgin Mary and Joseph, are the best examples of the mission of the Church, Synod and synodality. Our dedication to the Church and her mission is nothing but “journeying together” to announce the Good News to the whole world. In recent months, we have been silent spectators watching the gruesome war between Russia and Ukraine. We are wondering how people could maliciously kill each other in their internecine quarrels, ignoring the fact that all of us are children of one God and, consequently, we are brothers and sisters to one another. We should all vigorously pray that better sense may prevail in the minds of these warring nations and that they should promptly stop this irrational war. Most countries are silent towards war, keeping themselves aloof from possible troubles. They are not honest, courageous, or promoters of truth but peacefully walk along with evil and evildoers. It is the greatest sin against humanity and conscience. The Spirit of synodality looks forward to the day all come together to “journeying together”. “We are invited to speak with authentic courage and honesty (*parrhesia*) in order to integrate freedom, truth, and charity. Everyone can grow in understanding through dialogue” (U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2021). Let us come together, think together, and journey together so that we may enjoy peace together in the Lord.

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