

Learnings from the Council of Jerusalem for Today's Parish

In the first blog in this series, we took a look at characteristics of a synodal approach to being the church, based on Acts 15. So here's the bonus, "So What?"



What can we learn about synodality from the Acts of the Apostles?

- It's a "we" thing, for sure. No one person has all the wisdom, understanding, right judgment and Spirit insight.
- It takes time. Maybe a LOT of time, during which there will be continuing controversy.
- It will be uncomfortable. Debate, discussion, controversy, competing arguments that come from sound foundations and reasoning, sides and camps all make the in-between time uncomfortable.
- Sharing the decision is also a "we" endeavor. There's courage, commitment and consistency in a small community who discerns, decides and then disseminates the decision.
- Confidence in the Holy Spirit is shared openly. The decision comes from the Spirit.
- Ongoing encouragement and presence is critical to acceptance of the decision.

How do we answer those who say this is just a Pope Francis thing?

So what can we understand and share about synodality so that others don't make the same mistakes I did as I encountered the word: not knowing what it means and not knowing where it came from? Here are some suggestions.

1. It's not new at all. Pope Francis is engaging in a Vatican II practice called *ressourcement*: reaching back and bringing a practice from another time into this time.¹ (And you'll get cool points for that great word *ressourcement*!)
2. It's part of the ongoing work to receive more fully the work of Vatican II. Pope Francis is the first fully Vatican II Pope for the Church. As such, he is familiar with the methods used by the Council, methods that are also part of synodality: wide and lengthy consultation, proposals, revisions, dialogue, debate, discernment, and decision, followed now by 50+ years of implementation.
3. The word does not roll off our tongues, but it's a precise word for a precise work, so we need to learn to pronounce it, use it correctly and embrace the culture change it demands.

These three ideas help ground synodality squarely in our theological understanding of the Church as the Body of Christ, in communion with Christ and one another, journeying together, listening to the Spirit and so cooperating with God in the creation of the Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven, even as we also journey together toward eternal life with God. Onward!

Photo by Benjamin Grull on Unsplash

¹Gabriel Flynn and Paul D. Murray. *Ressourcement: A Movement for Renewal in Twentieth-Century Catholic Theology*. Published to Oxford Scholarship Online. January 2012.

<https://oxford.universitypressscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199552870.001.0001/acprof-9780199552870-chapter-25> Accessed 6-10-22