



PASTORAL LETTER: PRAYER FOR THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, 2023

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As many of you will already know, I will be attending the forthcoming XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops which will open in Rome on 4th October¹. Together with the Archbishop of Southwark, the Most Reverend John Wilson, I will be representing the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales. To prepare prayerfully for the Synod, the members of the General Assembly will take part in an ecumenical vigil of prayer on the evening of 30th September, followed by a three-day spiritual retreat.

This Synod is an important moment in the life of the Universal Church. Put simply, synodality is the whole People of God 'walking together' in faith under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Father Pope Francis hopes that this synodal process will help the Church to discern more deeply how, in its communion, participation and mission, the whole People of God can be more effective in our witness to Christ in today's world.

In the Catholic and secular media there has been much debate and speculation about the Synod. It has generated both a variety of hopes and an array of fears. Conscious of this fact, Pope Francis has said:

*"The synod now taking place is, and should be, a journey in accordance with the Spirit, not a parliament for demanding rights and claiming needs in accordance with the agenda of the world, nor an occasion for following wherever the wind is blowing, but the opportunity to be docile to the breath of the Holy Spirit. For on the sea of history, the Church sets sail only with him, for he is 'the soul of the Church', the heart of synodality, the driving force of evangelization."*²

It is paramount then, that the whole Church joins in prayer for the guidance of the Holy Spirit over the synodal process. Recently, the General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, His Eminence Mario Cardinal Grech, wrote to bishops throughout the world and asked them to encourage the lay faithful, religious and clergy of their dioceses to pray for the Synod, so that from the whole Church "an unceasing prayer" may ascend to Almighty God for the Holy Father Pope Francis and for all the members of the Synodal Assembly. He wrote:

*"The Synod is above all, an event of prayer and listening that involves not only the members of the Synodal Assembly, but every baptized person and every particular Church. Indeed, all of us are called at this time to unite in communion of prayer and insistent invocation of the Holy Spirit to guide us in discerning what the Lord is asking of His Church today."*³

I invite everyone, therefore, in our parishes, religious communities and schools, to pray privately and in common⁴ for the Synod members over the course of the next month.

On the two Sundays preceding the Synod, 24th September and 1st October, special intentions provided by the Holy See should be included in the Universal Prayers⁵, and on Sunday 1st October, a 'Solemn Blessing'⁶ may be given by the celebrant, at his discretion, at the end of the Mass.

Additionally, in the Diocese of Leeds, I ask that parishes include the prayer, *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*⁷, following the Prayer after Communion and before the dismissal at the conclusion of weekday and Sunday Masses during the course of the Synod⁸. I hope too, that where the liturgical calendar permits, at least one weekday Mass will be celebrated in each parish during the period of the Synod using the proper texts from the Roman Missal, 'For a Synod'⁹.

As the month of October is dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary, I invite you to consider offering a decade of the Rosary each week to pray for the maternal intercession of the Mother of God for the Church and the Synod.

One of the intentions of the Universal Prayers provided by the Synod Office expresses the hope that *"the entire people of God, in a dynamism of communion, may feel that they are truly participating in the life of the Church."* If we pray for the Synod and for all of its members, then we engage in one of the most profound levels of participation in its work.

I thank the Prioress and Sisters of the Carmelite Monastery at Wood Hall, who have offered to pray daily for the Synod of Bishops. In the coming weeks, I hope that you too will pray for our Holy Father Pope Francis, for me your bishop, and for all the bishops, religious and lay faithful taking part in the Synodal Assembly in Rome.

✠ Marcus
Bishop of Leeds

Given at Leeds on 15th September 2023, and appointed to be read at celebrations of Mass, published through parish and school electronic distribution systems and websites, and made available to be taken away from the churches and chapels of the Diocese on Saturday 23rd/Sunday 24th September 2023.

¹ Information about the Synod, including the working document for the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, can be found at: <https://www.synod.va/en.html>

² Pope Francis, Homily on Pentecost Sunday, 2023

³ Letter to Bishops, 12th September 2023

⁴ Particularly during communal periods of prayer in a parish (Liturgy of the Hours, Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, Rosary, etc.)

⁵ See attached: UNIVERSAL PRAYER - For the XXV and XXVI Sundays of Ordinary Time (A)

⁶ See attached: BLESSING AT THE END OF THE EUCHARISTIC CELEBRATION

⁷ This prayer is being used throughout the world. It was printed on the prayer cards distributed throughout the diocese at the beginning of the synodal process. See attached: Prayer for the Synod - *Adsumus Sancte Spiritus*

⁸ 4th October to 29th October 2023

⁹ The Roman Missal, pp.1310 to 1311