

I often muse about whether or not those who lived through significant, seismic moments of history are aware of their impact at the time. And yet, here we are, by God's grace, having lived through a global pandemic and waiting *not as mere spectators but active participants* in what promises to be the most impactful synod on the culture and mission of our Church since the Second Vatican Council. We are witnesses here and now to our Church (which for generations has swept the important role of women's communion, mission and participation under the proverbial rug) finally placing it at the center of its conversation!

Synodality is as ancient as the Church itself, as we've had a glimpse of in these Gospel accounts tonight. Jesus spent three years of public ministry teaching His followers in the School of Synodality. Asking them to listen. Showing them what listening looked like. Asking them to look in the dark, ignored and unexpected places. Asking them to poke at both the hard and the soft flesh of humanity, knowing *that* is where God reveals Himself. Challenging them with parables, rather than lectures, so that the knowledge was first *personal*. Because Jesus understood that for us, *hearing* is one thing. *Listening* is another. As we heard this past weekend in Matthew's Gospel "We often *look* but don't *see*; *hear* but not *listen*! Those who have ears: HEAR! So we can understand with our hearts and be converted." No better Gospel preaching synodality am I right? And the bridge between hearing and listening is empathy. We cannot effectively listen to one another unless our posture is one of openness and accompaniment. Synodality is a willingness to journey with someone to a place where our previously held notions might be challenged. A place where we are willing to be wrong! Dare I say a space where our minds are invited to be changed. And a journey which requires us to check our own agendas before we go through security. A place where we are asked to sit in productive tension and not leap at solutions.

I've got a 16 year old daughter (Eva) and a 12 year old son (Noah). I am certain that generations of parents before me have faced more significant challenges than our own but I will admit that nothing could have prepared me for parenting young children through a Global Pandemic, or dinner time conversations about the necessity for Active Shooter Drills in their elementary school classrooms. No one could have briefed me on how to explain to my son that *consent is required* or to my daughter that while women are finally being acknowledged for their contributions in almost every arena of Western Civilization, they haven't yet been in the Church in which she was to be confirmed this year. *Modern Life* and *Modern Church* have inarguably arrived at a tipping point; and Pope Francis has offered us a tool that was vibrant at the Church's foundation.

The Synod on Synodality is a recovery of a tradition that has always been the primary way the Church was meant to communicate its needs. Because Jesus Himself was synodal. From the time he was lost, at 12 years of age, sending His mother into an understandable panic, where was He? He was 'sitting among the teachers, *listening to them* and *asking them questions*, and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And His mother kept this in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom and favor with God.'

This is the heart of discipleship: If it's a system that works for Jesus, it better be a practice we get really good at! Listening, asking questions, being amazed, keeping things in our heart, growing in wisdom and favor with God. That is Synodality.

I read recently that in the Gospels Jesus was asked 187 Questions. He directly answers 8 of them. He Himself asks 307. So perhaps if the Lord of the Universe existed in a place where *complexity* was welcome, and *certainty* a rarity, we better aspire to live in that same place.

So tonight we've toggled, and will continue to toggle between examples of Synodal listening past and present. The most pivotal example of which is undoubtedly in the message Mary brings to the bereft disciples. Did Mary know the message Jesus commissioned her to 'Go and Tell' would simultaneously contain the most consequential moment of history whilst also being utterly dismissed? Perhaps she did. She'd seen the disciples dismiss Jesus Himself as He shared with them clearly that He must die, and rise again. And yet, full of a hope (that can only be borne from a resurrection) she did tell. Despite being an inadequate witness then, an often mischaracterized and maligned figure throughout our Churches history, and an inconveniently placed woman as the central witness to Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection now: she did tell. But did they listen?

In October of 2017 a global, survivor-led, movement against sexual violence called 'Me Too' began. 'Me Too' is dedicated to creating pathways for healing, justice, action, and leadership. All of which began by a powerful affirmation of *listening* to victims of sexual violence who had previously been silent or silenced. The movement empowered many survivors of sexual abuse to finally share their stories. Decades of corrosive silence was given breath, life, community, and accreditation; and abuse was given a holy reckoning. Tables were overturned.

In 2013 three radical black female political organizers, Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi — created a Black-centered political will and movement-building project called #BlackLivesMatter. It was in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer. Black Lives Matter serves as a rallying cry for black voices, who have been fatally silenced by violent systems of oppression. They seek to claim a space for Black innovation and imagination. A vehicle for black voices to be fundamentally acknowledged and subsequently amplified and a sacred space to center black-joy. In modern American culture we are being asked to plumb the depths of our own inherent racism. An inward listening. We are asked to recall Jesus' Synodal parable of the

Good Samaritan as we watch our sisters and brothers who literally bleed, innocent, crying out for their mothers on the side of our streets. We are being asked to hear their voices and listen to their experiences. We are being called by God to put away our weapons and heal one another with a supernatural power only the Spirit can provide. It's uncomfortable and it's synodal.

One can't help but think of the hemorrhaging woman when faced with the reality of gender-based bias in healthcare even today. A 2019 study showed that an alarming 50% of women have reported being dismissed, ignored, or not believed by a healthcare professional. This kind of discrimination has tangible and at times catastrophic consequences. When women are sick they wait on average 25% longer for an accurate diagnosis, *wait longer* to receive pain management in emergency rooms, and are *less likely to be offered* pain medication. 40% of women who have ultimately been diagnosed with some form of auto-immune related disease and/or disorder have been told they were "complainers, hypochondriacs, or too focussed on their health". In essence, called hysterical. A term which was derived from the Greek word for Uterus. These statistics, for the record, are alarmingly higher in women of color. A new study from the Journal of the American Medical Association found that maternal mortality rates have more than doubled in the past decade, and black mothers are dying at the highest rate. Women are suffering, they are reaching out, and they are not being heard. 12 years of waiting for healing doesn't seem so implausible in light of our modern context of inattentiveness to the suffering of women. And yet our Lord, whose ears are so finely attuned to the wounds we all carry, didn't even need her words for His heart to be open to her story. And her ears too were open when she heard of the signs and wonders He was performing. She was open to a miracle, and resigned to strive in hope and faith just to touch the hem of His garment. Refusing to lose hope. What an inspiration she is for every person who might feel unseen!

The scourge of clericalism over our Church continues to reign. Lay people and ordained equally complicit in its endurance. Creating a system akin to a pair of sound-reducing headphones when it comes to important listening to the realities of the modern Church. And continuing to breed a culture where the mysteries of the kingdom may in fact be *revealed to the little ones*, but might never be heard by those with influence and impact. Those with a seat at the table perhaps too unwilling to abide in a place of uncertainty, ambiguity, mystery... Seeming to prefer rigidity, power, bloated hierarchy and gaslighting.

Generations of women have held Jesus' words "Go and Tell" heavy on their hearts. They have turned their vocational calls and their Spirit-anointed baptismal dignity over and over in their conversations and their prayer lives. They have "Gone and Told" and like Mary Magdalene before them, they are told Christ's call for them is an 'idol tale'. So why then Jesus? Why Mary? Why a woman when you must have known she would be overshadowed and marginalized?

Perhaps Mary was chosen to be the first witness to the most important moment in the history of the world because *she listened*. She heard what Jesus had told the disciples- that He would rise from the dead on the third day!? Despite every possible intellectual proposition that it couldn't be true. Did Mary truly listen to Jesus? A deep synodal listening, that transcended what she ever thought possible. Did that listening, which Jesus had been teaching her for three years of intimacy together, transform what her own intellect claimed as 'possible' and invite her to remain keeping vigil? Knowing in the depths of her soul the words that Jesus spoke were true, even if so many of His other followers had not understood or forgotten them.

Perhaps she was chosen because in that listening and in that sacred synodal vigil, as she awaited the voice of the promised Spirit, it was revealed that despite every challenge of being believed, being heard, she *persevered in telling*. Certainly her message was one of unrelenting

hope because of its very content! Our Lord lives. He is not dead. He is alive and active and working through a woman. Perhaps her expectations remained, despite even some of her very dearest friends dismissing her, her expectation of God being present in *her voice*. While her message might fall on rocky soil, the Spirit was drawing forth from the very depths of creation, rich soil: synodal soil.

And today, from the great cloud of witnesses she watches and intercedes on our behalf. She watches in joy as women everywhere speak of the legacy she leaves us. Waiting, albeit daily dismissed, for a time when women of tomorrow will inherit a listening Church.

As I watched my daughter walk toward our Bishop with tears of joy flowing down her face, with her grandmother steadily accompanying her to the door of her own adult faith, I was reminded that certainty never grew faith. In fact the only thing certainty can do is invite pride. Being honest with our kids, and ourselves, about our questions can till the ground for hope and invite the powerful accompaniment of the Holy Spirit right alongside our doubts and struggles. Seemingly contradictory ideas develop together and offer a faith *not built on certainty* or having the right answers but a faith that welcomes mystery! A faith that believes in Christ still being alive! A faith whose tradition is as planted as a 2000 year old tree; and as flexible as its newest branches.

A passage of scripture I've prayed over for my daughter Eva all year in preparation for her Confirmation was from St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians: *My response is to get down on my knees before God, this magnificent caretaker who parcels out all heaven and earth. I ask God to strengthen you by the Spirit—not a brute strength but a glorious inner strength—that Christ will live in you as you open the door and invite him in. And I ask him that with both feet planted firmly on love, you'll be able to take in, with all followers of Jesus, the extravagant dimensions of Christ's love. Reach out and experience the breadth! Test*

*its length! Plumb the depths! Rise to the heights! Live full lives, full in the fullness of God. God can do anything, you know—far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us.*

So my siblings in Christ, siblings of Mary Magdalene, and of our gracious brother Our Savior, whom we follow closely and by whom we are called, and from whom we've learn the truth, and for whom we labor in love, and for whose sake we show up:

Our Lord sees you. Loves you. Knows you. Hears you. Listens to you. Keep going. Continue to preach the Good News of Synodality as Jesus did. Hear and Preach as Mary Magdalene heard and preached. As the early Church did. Jesus' family is worthy of our 'all'. Jesus is worthy of every tear, and ounce of patience and even horizon's we might never see. Hope does not disappoint.