

# ***Diocese of Plzen***

## ***Celebrating the Diocesan Synod (7 January 2024)***

The celebration of a Diocesan Synod is a celebration of joy. It is a movement together, guided by the Holy Spirit. The Diocesan Synod is a special ecclesial moment when the entire Diocese gathers in love and satisfaction, and moves ahead together as a lively family to celebrate their faith in Christ. Under the Bishop as the spiritual father and guide, the priests, religious and lay persons unite as one body, as a living Church. What do they unite to do?

- To mark a new beginning, in faith, hope and love;
- To celebrate the gift of faith and love;
- To thank God for the gift of faith;
- To pray together and listen to the Holy Spirit;
- To listen to one another;
- To read the Word of God and to meditate and reflect on it together;
- To evaluate how far the living faith has become consolidated in the lives of every member of the Diocese;
- To evaluate and acknowledge past mistakes;
- To make amendments for past errors and to ask God's pardon;
- To see how far everyone participates, and to discover those who have fallen off the track;
- To take reckonings of what was lacking;
- To reckon and evaluate the pastoral resources: human, material, spiritual resources;
- To make a joint pastoral plan, and to see how to perceive the future with hope.

A Synod is a celebration of joy and gladness; it is a lively and exciting event; it also involves much work, much research and discussion. It is a place where emotion and reasoning meet in joyful, spiritual harmony. It is a special school of learning.

The First Council of Jerusalem was the first form of a Synod, where Peter gathered the Apostles (including Paul) to deliberate together. There was unity of intent, and Peter as the Vicar of Christ was a symbol of that unity.

Today, we celebrate the Baptism of Christ. It reminds us of our Baptism. Christ's Baptism was of fundamental importance in his life and work: it marked the beginning of his messianic mission. It was his messianic anointing.

For us, Baptism opens the door to other Sacraments. Just like the event of Epiphany, the Baptism of Christ is also the manifestation of his identity.

Through Baptism, we obtain a Christian identity. In the Synod, we celebrate that unique identity, we explore it and discover its meaning, we give testimony of it and we share it with others.

At Christ's Baptism, there was a Trinitarian manifestation: the voice of God the Father was heard from heaven; Christ himself was baptised; the Holy Spirit descended in the form of a dove.

This Trinitarian dimension is also present in various ways in the synodal pathway.

The voice of the Father was heard saying: This is my Beloved Son, listen to him. In fact, in Matthew 3:16-17, we read: *"And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened[a] and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him; 17 and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."*

The voice of the Father was a clear sign of recognition. Being the Son, he is the full revelation of the Father. In the Synod, during the listening process, the Father will once again reveal the identity of his Son to us. And the Holy Spirit will descend like a dove in our midst.

Christ had no need of Baptism. John even reminded him of that. But he insisted. Because, through his Baptism, Christ leads to his Father; he associates with our human nature and makes us adopted children of God.

Baptism washes away sin. In his Baptism, Christ shows us the path towards the forgiveness of our sins. Water assumes the symbolism of cleansing and purification.

So, today, as we initiate this special synodal movement and experience, let us think of our Baptism. It was an intensive beginning of the Christian life for us.

How far have we gone as Christians? Do non-Christians appreciate our identity and praise our goodness, or do they scorn us as hypocrites?

Do we make daily serious efforts to identify with Christ and his Church?

What expectations do we have in this coming diocesan synod?

What spiritual and religious novelty do we intend to share with others?

Baptised persons now belong to Christ, and they have the same inheritance with Christ. Do I identify with this consciousness?

Many people need spiritual consolation and motivation and encouragement coming from Christians. Is our local Church ready to satisfy these needs?

Walking together also means walking even by night, through difficult and challenging pathways, through misunderstanding and pain. How will our Synod address these realities within the context of Christ's baptismal challenge?

The beauty and joy of being a Christian permeate the lives of many people whom we know. How do we enhance this beauty and gladness?

We pray that the strength of the Holy Spirit will be our guide in the coming months, as we pray and deliberate together. Surely the Lord will open for us, and for you, the path to holiness during this synod.

May God bless our intentions and our plans, and may he be in our midst always, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

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