

The Spiritual Dynamics of Synodality in the Small Christian Community

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Abstract

The article "The Spiritual Dynamics of Synodality in the Small Christian Community" has sought to underscore the enormous contributions that synodality through the synodal process could unravel to enhance the spiritual paths in the Small Christian Community. Given the fact that these problems besieged the Small Christian Community: undue control by the Parish Priest, inordinate desire of the leadership, class distinction or differentiation syndrome, cultural pluralism, patriarchy and inadequate animation of pastoral agents and the community members coupled with the overwhelming realities of individualism, secularism, skepticism, cynicism, apathy and acedia in the modern world. The emergency of synodality, advancing listening, hospitality, participation, communion, equality, equity, and openness in the synodal process, has offered great prospects for the Small Christian Community. Predicating the Small Christian on the paradigm of the Trinity as well as being mindful of its immense inputs in developing the Church through the creation of many Pastoral Areas and Parishes, revamping lukewarm Christians, bringing back the lost Christians and making the active Christians more proactive, certain reforms would be feasible by the dint of synodality that seeks the devolution of power, inclusivity, listening and hospitality, changing the mindset in a different Church, harnessing diversity for diverse pastoral strategy inter alia.

The key words are: Synodality, Small Christian Community, Spiritual Dynamics, Synodal Process, Synodal Church.

Introduction

It is a known fact that the Church started in household precincts. Thus, Ernest Best states: "In the NT, "church" always denotes a group of people, either all the Christians in a city (Acts 14: 23; 1Cor. 1: 2; 2Cor. 1: 1) or those gathered for worship in a particular house (Rom. 16:5; 1Cor. 16: 19)..." (Achte-meier 168). Felix Wilfred augments the notion of the Church with elaborate examples:

During the first three centuries of Christianity Christians would meet in each other's homes. Lydia, for instance, offered her house as a

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meeting venue for her brothers and sisters in Christ (Acts 16:15 and 40). Priscilla and Aquila not only turned their house into a house church (Romans 16:4-5); they were also actively involved in Kingdom work and encouraged Paul and Apollo in their ministries (Acts 18:2-5 and 26). Others who hosted local churches in their homes were Gaius (Romans 16:23), Nymphas (Colossians 4:15) and Titus Justus (Acts 18:7). Whenever we read about ‘houses’ as meeting places in records of early Christianity, this does not primarily mean buildings but *families* (20).

This articulation of the Church makes it a place where there is intimacy springing from personal encounter of those who form the community. Hence, Ernest explains, “All of these phrases [bride of Christ, vine and branches, describing the Church] draw Christians closely together and closely to Christ, giving them a deep sense of identity with him and with other Christians” (Achte-meier 168). Based on this, Christianity inherently demands its adherents to have profoundly knitted relationship. No wonder, the early Christians were identified as having one mind and heart in their assembly (Acts 4: 32).

This closeness is what Jesus disclosed about his relationship with the Father: “The Father and I are one” (John 10: 30). In this regard, Jesus shows that His oneness with the Father hinges on the evidence of His works because He does them in His name (Okure 1555). In fact, the unity of the Father and the Son encompasses the community of believers (Perkins 969). Thus, in His priestly prayer, Jesus says: “Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one” (John 17: 11). Such oneness becomes not only an articulation of intimacy with God but also an attraction to belong to the Body of Christ by others (John 17: 21). Therefore, this unity poses a challenge to the world in the same way that the Trinitarian communion is (Perkins 979).

Since spirituality has to do with the influence and control of the Holy Spirit in the life of an individual and synodality highlights the need to journey together as a Church, then Small Christian Community serves as a locus for the flourishing and flowering of a “Synodal Church”. Therefore, this article seeks to expound and expose the Trinitarian paradigm for the Small Christian Community, its prospects and challenges. It will elucidate on the meaning, shape and form of Synodality and the spiritual dynamics of synodality as well as aligning Synodality with Small Christian Community so as to showcase the possible reform that the Small Christian Community requires in a “Synodal Church”. Lastly, a conclusion is drawn.

The Trinity: A Template for Small Christian Community

Understanding the Trinity has posed numerous challenges over the years. This is consequent upon the deep and unfathomable mystery that it expresses. Above all, Trinitarian discourses have to do with a reality or

phenomenon that is infinite. This, in itself, defies the intellectual scope of finite and limited humans (CCC 237). According to Peter Toon,

There is no systematic explanation of the doctrine of God as Trinity in the NT, though the Trinitarian pattern (...Acts 20:28; Titus 3:4-6; Heb 10:29; Rev 1:4-5) is present. The dogma of the Trinity found in Nicene Creed may be said to be the systematic presentation of the implications of the Trinitarian suggestions, hints, and patterns of the NT, against the background of the OT. The classic formula is that there is one God and three Persons, and that each person shares the one Being or Godhead with the two other Persons (1038).

Obviously, the Trinitarian reality cannot be totally comprehended because as our knowledge of God deepens, we come to realise that there is more yet unknown. We always remain at the mystical dawn of St. John of Cross in his explication of the journey of the soul, as far as our knowledge of God is concerned.

Based on divine revelation, it is abundantly clear that there is unalloyed and undivided relationship in the Trinity: "The Father is that which the Son is, the Son is that which the Father is, i.e., by nature one God..." (CCC 250). In addition, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: "*The divine persons are relative to one another. Because it does not divide the divine unity, the real distinction of the persons from one another resides solely in the relationships which relate them to one another...indeed everything (in them) is one there is no opposition of relationship...*" (255). In their inseparability, they show forth in their operation what is proper to each one of them, especially in the divine mission of the Son through His incarnation and the gift of the Holy Spirit (CCC 267).

In the Trinity, there is mutuality that eliminates any form of conflict, superiority and misrepresentation. It is a togetherness that is imbued with love, kindness, goodness and interdependency. Each one contributes to the glory of the other. None thinks or lives for himself. Such cohesion and configuration is what synodality aspires for in the long run. Thus, the Trinity is the source and prototype of any synodality. Their sense of synodality radiates what the Church looks forward to and intends to achieve in the "Synodal Church". Therefore, the Small Christian Community can draw great lessons from the Trinity, the foundation of the Christian life. Obviously, without the Trinity, there is nothing like Christianity. In order, however, to harness the unfathomable message of the Trinity, it is apt to elucidate on the Small Christian Community.

What is the Small Christian Community?

Over the years, various ways or images such as Small Christian Communities, Ecclesial Christian Communities, Basic Christian Communities or Church in the Neighbourhood were used to describe the

Small Christian Community because of its significance in shaping and developing the Church, particularly the Church in Africa that has had two synods on Small Christian community in 1994 and 2009. However, the varied descriptions allude to the same purpose or goal, and for this research, the Small Christian Community is adopted. Nevertheless, John Baptist Katembo states that the Small Christian Community is a “Small group where people can come together and share their lives together and read the Gospels together and ask themselves together about the will of Jesus to their lives. And so everyone can deepen his Christian faith” (Web). Recent research has revealed that there could be over 80 names describing small Christian communities (Doeme 7).

The overriding dynamic of the Small Christian Community is to bring the Gospel to the doorstep of the believer. It is a grassroots approach to preaching the Gospel so as to enhance the commitment of each believer in the neighbourhood. Consequently, it is the aggregate conglomeration of families within the same vicinity for proper dissemination and propagation of the faith with a robust and an unflinching vigour for a complete conversion of the believer. By so doing, the Christian faith assumes an unprecedented attraction for the evangelisation of the peoples.

Therefore, the word “Small” is not only meant to describe the size of the community but rather to designate its capacity to grow, as a family tree that bears fruit in plenty. Again, it refers to its effectiveness of a little group like the mustard seed to provide shelter to all, Mt. 13:13. Similarly, the word “Christian” is not to discriminate against other religious bodies but that it is motivated by faith in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of the Eternal Father. Whereas the word “Community” suggests that it is characterised by a strong sense of belongingness, mutuality, sharing and solidarity among people living within proximate parameters (Doeme 7). Having clarified the composite terms of the Small Christian Community, it is worthwhile to divulge its challenges and prospects.

The Prospects and Challenges of Small Christian Community

There is no gainsaying that Small Christian Community is made up of people who share many things in common. This stems from the geographical setting that the believers share together. A people who, perhaps, know each other very well; they go to the same store, mall, market, clinic and so forth. Probably, their children attend the same school. The level of interaction is high and so, their closeness. In this way, Small Christian Community obliterates the anonymity and impersonality characteristic of membership in the large parish structure. Thus, it becomes a locus where the Christian faith can be intensely lived and shared. No wonder, in most African communities, it is perceived as the ecclesiastical extension of the African extended family or clan (Orobator 114).

Furthermore, Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator maintains that,

The ecclesiological expression of Small Christian Community corresponds to uniquely African values of interdependence, harmony, cooperation and hospitality that are constitutive elements of the human community. Commonly rendered as 'Ubuntu', this anthropological principle, grounds the fundamental understanding of person-in-community as wholeness, relationality and solidarity (114).

This understanding, therefore, helps to highlight communal belonging, inter-relationship and shared vision of and responsibility for the mission of the Church in the Small Christian Community. Therefore, no one exists just for him or herself in such an African community setting. There is a sense of obligation towards the other. Obviously, this makes it a fertile and productive ground for the insertion of the Small Christian Community. Therefrom, the hearts of the people will be inflamed with deep sentiments of Christian's demand of unconditional love.

Additionally, the Small Christian Community by its size is small enough to facilitate close and meaningful relationship and flexible enough to address a variety of issues in the everyday life of Christians. In brief, it is deemed as a new way of being church and a "church on the move" under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (Orobator 114). This means that more recognition is given to the Spirit of God to propel the machinery of evangelisation. Thus, Christians should approach the Spirit of God as the first principle of any endeavour. They are to allow the Spirit to choose, decide and act upon every step all the way. From all ramifications, this is the manner that early Christian Community behaved and acted: in the choice of the apostolic succession of Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:24-26); the election of the seven deacons (Acts 6:2-6); the inclusion of the Gentiles among God's elect (Acts 11:1-18; 15:1-30). It is categorically clear that it was a Spirit-driven community.

The Small Christian Community enables its members not only to share the Word of God but also to identify their needs. By so doing, it serves a positive and strong force in paving ways to surmount their challenges. This is how the Small Christian Community worked in Latin America by which the Church became a formidable force in addressing the corruption, injustices and other maladies. In addition, Small Christian Community has facilitated growth in some parishes. It has enabled many lapsed Christians within the neighbourhood to return to the Church because the Church is now within their reach. Similarly, it has strengthened weak Catholics to be more vibrant and the active ones to be more proactive. These developments have resulted to making the Small Christian Community metamorphose into a Pastoral Area and eventually into a New Parish.

However, there are many challenges in the contemporary society that can unsettle and mar the beauty and grandeur of the Small Christian Community. The secularization that is rife in the present-day society, where God is relegated to the background and humans idolize themselves. Moral integrity is lost in the labyrinth of a society that sees itself as the arbiter of

good and evil. Thus, subjective views become the objective truth and everything is allowed as long as my judgement is the yardstick. This is further accentuated by the individualism in which every dimension of life is privatized. Hence, others are regarded as either unnecessary or unhealthy intruders. In this regard, individual's comfort, desire and aspiration are chased after without restraint. No one cares about who is affected, what is destroyed, and how it is achieved. The means justify the end.

The cultural factors are pivotal, particularly in the African society where male domination is greatly expressed. No doubt, the Small Christian Community is supposed to create an atmosphere for fair play and equality to thrive. Besides, more often than not, the number of women overruns that of men. "One of the greatest challenges for the communities today is to succeed in getting men involved in the life of SCCs.... It has been noticed that SCCs tend to turn easily into simple prayer groups where the presence of women prevail" (Orobator 117).

Naturally, with the prevailing presence of large numbers of women, it is expected that they would play a prominent role in the leadership of the Small Christian Community. Nevertheless, patriarchal reality of the African society pushes them into oblivion. "It is not uncommon that where few men participate in SCCs, such men 'naturally' take over the running of the communities; conversely, women tend to or are coerced to acquiesce to the authority of the male members of Small Christian Communities" (Orobator 118). It goes without saying then that this has engendered uneasiness, and at best, defeated one of the primary objectives of Small Christian Community that guarantees equal opportunity for maximum participation of one and all. In the same vein, clericalism is a deep-seated challenge because some parish priests want to be in control of every segment of the Small Christian Community. This is even more pleasant than those who do not want to establish it at all because of the phobia that it will reduce their influence in the Parish Community. Such power-driven mentality has truncated the flourishing of the Small Christian Community in many dioceses and archdioceses today. Thus, Orobator says, "Clerical control and supervision account for some of the factors militating against SCCs and BECs as actualizations of the church in the local milieu" (116).

Furthermore, there are instances where the leaders in the Small Christian Community have abused their power to the extent that some members were exorbitantly taxed for the sacraments or unjustly punished or victimized. This has led to serious friction and squabble in the community. According to Orobator, "They are at liberty to impose conditions and create regulations that serve to determine access to certain sacraments by the local Christians. In extreme circumstances, the imposition of conditions and regulations can deteriorate into punitive measures" (119).

Again, the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the Small Christian Community has been a source grave misunderstanding. In a homogeneous community, the tendency is either to look down on another because of

familiarity or to become a closed community where others cannot access or are put on the margins. On the other hand, a heterogeneous community can become uneasy where class distinction is emphasised. Therefore, “Where SCCs are supposed to bridge such gaps, their organization can reinforce the lines of division and separation. The level of belonging and participation of membership would depend on how much members feel at home in the community” (Orobator 120).

In view of the prospects that the Small Christian Community offers in the drive towards a “Synodal Church”, while not mindless of the hurdles contained therein, it is relevant to elicit from synodality what spiritual impetus can be gleaned from it. Therefore, the beam light will dwell now on synodality and its spiritual dynamics.

Meaning, Shape and Form of Synodality

From the etymological perspective, the word “synodality” is a combination of two Greek words *syn* which means “with” and *hodos* meaning “way or path”. Thus, synodality implies walking together, taking a common path. Therefore, Pope Francis invites the Church to trace and tread a common path that is why he tags it “Towards a Synodal Church: Communion, Mission, Participation”. The word “towards” signifies a movement that is directed to another which, in this case, is the “Synodal Church”. Again, the fact that a movement towards another is inferred, means that there is some deviation (Igbokwe 62). For this reason, “The goal of the proposed synodal conversation in the universal church is to revive the sense of faith in the church and discover the common path (*syn+odos* = with+ path = the way) for the church in our time” (Abeyasingha 25; Igbokwe 58). Obviously, there is/are some disturbing issues about the faith that obscure the Church’s image and perhaps, leading and living the people of God with distorted and disordered understanding.

This is why the ‘Synodal Church’ is striving to inform, reform, transform and form a new mindset among Christ faithful. In fact, this has been the position of the Council Fathers at the Second Vatican when they called the Church, “The People of God” (Lumen Gentium 9-17). A Church that embraces everyone, a Church that is inclusive. Herein is a Church that believes and lives in a communion: “The essence of synodality in the spirit of Vatican II is the communion of all the baptized, endowed with diverse charisms, vocations and ministries, which is most perfectly expressed in the Eucharistic assembly” (Bujak 156).

Therefore, the synodal process is not meant to create another Church but a different Church. “For a “different Church”, a Church open to the newness that God wants to suggest, let us with greater fervour and frequency invoke the Holy Spirit and humbly listen to him, journeying together as he, the source of communion and mission, desires: with docility and courage” (Abeyasingha 3). To this end, docility to the Holy Spirit must be given a prime of place. This is how the early Christian community was able to break the barriers for the inclusion of the Gentile Christians.

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Many great saints and theologians have expressed this sentiment in the sands of time, namely, St. Augustine of Hippo, St. John Chrysostom, St. John Newman, Yves Congar, Avery Dulles, St. Paul VI, St. John Paul II, Pope Benedict XVII to mention a few. They want all the baptised to actively participate in every aspect of the Church's life based on their specific charisms. By so doing, the synodal process will bear abundant and lasting fruits. Hence Pope Francis states:

We need a community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead. How important it is to dream together... By ourselves, we risk seeing mirages, things that are not there. Dreams, on the other hand, are built together. Let us dream, then, as a single human family, as fellow travelers sharing the same flesh, as children of the same earth which is our common home, each of us bringing the richness of his or her beliefs and convictions, each of us with his or her own voice, brothers and sisters all (Abeyasingha 5; Igboke 59).

It must be borne in mind that the synodal process is not democratization of Church's governance; rather it is meant to create a situation where "Everyone plays an active part, though with varied roles and contributions" - co-responsibility each according to his/her role at a given point of history in the church. It embodies the kingdom, proclaims the kingdom, awaits the coming of the kingdom" (Abeyasingha 6; Igboke 58). There is no doubt that everyone must be given the chance to share their experiences and be attentively listened to for a "Synodal Church" to emerge. Thus, "The issue of sin in all its manifestations needs to be addressed. This is a matter of not only providing an opportunity to be heard, but each feeling heard and carefully listened to" (Abeyasingha 27, Vademecum np). No wonder then that the synodal process began at the grassroots level, the Parish and is to culminate at the Universal Church, with Synod of the Bishops. Succinctly, this indicates down-to-top approach and not vice versa.

Needless to say that Pope Francis aims at the Church meeting the historical exigencies of new knowledge and a new global world consciousness, and exercising its missionary function in that world. In so doing, he challenges his fellow bishops to come together and act together as a world-Church. Hence, they will break free of the iron cage of neo-scholastic categories, bureaucratic thinking and rule-based judgments. He invites them to regain the dynamic and creative ways of thinking found in the Gospel (Abeyasingha 11; Bujak 149). In other words, the Bible must be reflectively consulted so that the grace of the Holy Spirit will inspire all to embrace a different Church. Generally speaking, there is always a resistance and skepticism towards what is new because it shakes up the very foundation of what is familiar, what has provided benefits to some, what is considered the only way for many years.

However, there are certain hurdles that might hamper the realization and actualization of the synodal process, key among them is clericalism. “Unfortunately, a rather closed attitude dominates the Church, which goes under the broad label of “clericalism.” On the side of the clergy, there is undue exercise of control, careerism, and among themselves envy” (Abeyasingha 26; Igbokwe 64, *Evangelii Gaudium* 102). This must be avoided at any cost so that the synodal process is not either stiffened, stifled or made sterile. It is obvious that “The essence of synodality in the spirit of Vatican II is the communion of all the baptized, endowed with diverse charisms, vocations and ministries, which is most perfectly expressed in the Eucharistic assembly” (Bujak 156).

“Another vice that the participants of the synod on synodality must overcome is the tendency to label and stereotype people and places. The Church in a journey together walks in unity and not in disorder. Labelling and stereotyping puts people or places in categories and creates divisions” (Igbokwe 71). Such biases can preclude the Church from moving beyond the present. It can result to seeing nothing good about and from the other. Again, it raises embers of discontent, disharmony and division which are counterproductive to the synodal process. Other matters of significance is secular humanism (excluding God and focusing on human person), myopism (dwelling on immediate issues) and reductionism (reducing the synod to something else or undermining its objective), and exclusion, which means overlooking a cross-section of the Church (Igbokwe 72-73). These are subtle and possible challenges that can mar and maim the synodal process.

The Spiritual Thrusts of Synodality

The synodal process is not an exercise of intellectual gymnastic but a spiritual process that lays much emphasis on the invocation and intervention of the Holy Spirit. This is obvious from the opening segment of the prayer composed for the “Synodal Church”: “We stand before You, Holy Spirit, as we gather together in Your name. With You alone to guide us, make Yourself at home in our hearts; Teach us the way we must go and how we are to pursue it...” (Vademecum np). At all times and in various places down the corridors of history in the Church, the Holy Spirit has provoked thoughts and inspired noble sentiments to push and pull the Church forward. No wonder *Vademecum* stresses that “The Synodal Process is first and foremost a *spiritual* process. It is not a mechanical data-gathering exercise or a series of meetings and debates. Synodal listening is oriented towards *discernment*” (np).

Discernment, however, is a gift of the Holy Spirit that assists one to interpret the stirrings of the Holy Spirit. Thus, the need to listen to everyone’s contributions. Besides, “Discernment is based on the conviction that God is at work in the world and we are called to listen to what the Spirit suggests to us. We are signs of a Church that listens and journeys: By listening, the Church follows the example of God himself, who listens to the cry of his people” (Igbokwe 65). That is to say, the synodal process guided by discernment

reclaims and radiates the Church's incarnational dynamism as the bride of Christ. It is a way to truly become the Church of Christ.

To this end, "a synodal spirituality is a way of life or praxis which integrates and makes concrete the three key elements of communion, participation, and mission. It ensures that we do not attempt to separate them in our reflection or in our praxis" (Hanvey et al eds 6). This definition asserts the fact that every dimension of the synodal process must be wholistically deemed. Given the fact that the Holy Spirit was the causal factor at the inception of the Church, therefore, He must influence the synodal process so that the Church becomes what the Lord God truly wants. That is why "synodality seeks to discern where the Holy Spirit is active in history, calling the Church to a deeper metanoia and openness to the needs and longings of humanity for the peace and grace of Christ" (Hanvey et al eds 11).

Mindful of the fact that the Church is vulnerable and susceptible in multiple ways from the prism of her humanness, which has been revealed in her abuse of power, pride, insensitivity, exclusivity and host of others; the necessity for healing and reform is expedient. Therefore, synodality is a humble process by which the Church acknowledges her pitfalls so that the wounded and the perpetrator can embrace each other in a realistic and truthful way through genuine forgiveness and reconciliation. Without this disposition, Church's renewal becomes a mirage and her mission is suffocated. In this way, her obligation to proclaim God's word will be met with much resistance (ITC 102-103).

In addition, synodality is to help the whole of the people of God to demolish the barriers which have kept them apart for centuries. By so doing, they will discover, share and rejoice in the many riches which unite them as gifts of the one Lord in virtue of the baptism they share. In the long run, synodality creates the bond of unity needed in diversity as a gift of the Holy Spirit (Bujak 156, 160; Eph 4:3). Meaning that synodality should "inspire people to dream... to make people's hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts, and restore strength to our hands for our common mission (*Vademecum* np).

Considering the fact that the synodal process is Bible based, giving credence for reflective hermeneutical application of the word of God, which entails the replete spiritualities contained therein will eventually surface. In this regard, the word of God speaks in its terms and breathes a newness that is sought for. This is because every aspect of God's word is inspired and God's spirit works through it. No wonder hospitality, a cherished virtue in both Old and New Testaments, is highly encouraged in the synodal process because it creates space for others. In other words, there is enough space for the existential presence of everyone and for the utilisation of their charisms. It is an invitation "to learn to welcome the other, the stranger and poor one, and even to graciously bless and acknowledge the other's dignity and gifts as much as hurt, outrage and suffering. Here, one may notice that the stirrings of a

thinking heart are enriched and formed by a note of melancholy” (Morrison 4). According to Von Balthasar, “The affectivity of hospitality is borne through a thinking heart of boldness: a disposition of kenotic self-giving wherein the “decision of faith” arrives at “the point of martyrdom” (Morrison 5). Of course, it means taking responsibility for the other to the point of dying for the other!

This is responsible for why “synodality is not so much an event or a slogan as a style and a way of being by which the Church lives out her mission in the world. 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” (*Vademecum* np). Thus, synodality makes the people of God to be co-responsible through deploying all their gifts at the service of the Church. For this reason Cardinal João Braz de Aviz, says “Pray, reflect, discuss and share your experiences, insights and desires. Do it with the freedom of those who place their trust in God and are thus able to overcome timidity, a sense of inferiority or worse still, reproaches and complaints” (Igbokwe 69).

More importantly, the synod process invites the people of God to holiness. So, Glenn Morrison maintains, “The Lord asks everything of us, and in return he offers us true life, the happiness for which we were created. He wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence. The call to holiness is present in various ways from the very first pages of the Bible” (2). In respect to synodality, holiness presupposes being detached from self and to totally cling to God. This is what listening implies, listening to the voice of God as well as listening to one another. Similarly, listening invites us in the synodal process to divest ourselves from all assumptions, prejudices and cynisms so as to pave way for what is transcendental and has a divine content. Thus, the Psalmist says, “Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory...” (115:1).

Most surprisingly, there is a tendency to resist what the Holy Spirit is trying to inspire us to undertake. We must abandon attitudes of complacency and comfort that lead us to make decisions purely on the basis of how things have been done in the past. This is affirmed by Aviz: “The synod discussions and sharing must be done in simplicity, without arrogance: “Let it be done in all simplicity, moved by the Holy Spirit, avoiding arrogance, without presumption but always having a sense of co-responsibility” (Igbokwe 69).

Certainly, a Church that journeys together will rediscover the inviolable dignity of peoples and of the function of authority as service will also be able to help civil society to be built up in justice and fraternity, and thus bring about a more beautiful and humane world for coming generations (*Vademecum* np). In so doing, the Church will be a light of the world and salt to earth fulfilling her mission in the world. Therefore, any form of laziness, indifference and disdain must be eschewed so that the common path will bring to fore the desired results.

Aligning Synodality with Small Christian Community

Noteworthy is the fact the Synodality and the Small Christian Community are byproducts of the Second Vatican Council. This is not to say that they are completely new to or/and in the Church. The nomenclature has always been there but without designation. From the onset, the Church existed as a Small Christian Community cognizant of the early Christian Church (Rom. 16:5; 1Cor. 16: 19). Given the fact the worshippers met in a house for their various celebrations, denotes the notion of Small Christian Community. From the conspectus of the missionary enterprise of Apostles' commission to go out in pairs, Synodality can be deduced (Luke 10:1ff). Similarly, the disciples' journey to Emmaus is expressive of Synodality (Luke 24:13ff). Whatever the case might be, Synodality has a lot to offer for the revival, renewal, reform and rejuvenation of the Small Christian Community. This is, first and foremost, due to the fact that Synodality operates along the lines of Small Christian Community.

No wonder the initial submission in the synodal process began at the parish level where the Small Christian Community exists. Herein lies those who are on the fringes and peripheries of the society; the poor and the voiceless; the nobodies and the 'leftovers', the marginalised and outcasts. Synodality intends to give them recognition and respect, to empower and appreciate them, to listen to them and harness their charisms. The synodal process believes that everyone has something to offer for the good of all; without the contribution of someone, the good of all will be greatly affected. In other words, we all form a common chain wherein the weakest is significant for the proper and adequate function of the whole. This is why St. Peter says that each one of us has been given a special grace of God (1Pt 4:10).

Similarly, Synodality adheres to the word of God in its reflection to attain its goal of changing mindset and giving birth to a different Church. For the word of God breathes His spirit always and everywhere. For this reason, the guidance, the influence and the inspiration that come from the word of God will always enrich, ennoble and evolve the Church's journey together as the people of God. A serious consideration for the synodal process that the Small Christian Community can embrace its spirit to guide the people's relationships on daily basis. By so doing, the people of God will analyse and interpret their affairs from divine realm based on divine content.

In addition, Synodality believes in the presence of the Holy Spirit who works mysteriously and for God's glory. At the beginning of the Church, the Holy Spirit traced the common path to be followed in precarious, turbulent and uncertain periods. Grappling with contemporary challenges, the Church invokes and implores the Holy Spirit to shed more light through the synodal process so that she can discern what is right and just, good and humane, praiseworthy and excellent. This understanding should trickle down to the Small Christian Community thereby creating more space for the Holy Spirit against reductionist propensity of human manipulation. In this way, the Small Christian Community becomes the hub of discerning the will of God.

Synodality opines that diversity can be harnessed to enrich the life of the Church. So, individual needs and differences can assist the Church to develop varied ways of assessing the myriad contributions that will emanate from these diverse repertoire of human experiences. Each person sees the world from their own angle which in the long run will provide multiple ways of viewing the same issue. In the end, many options are provided from which a well-informed decision can be made. Of course, such a decision would eventually stand the test of time. This is suitable for a heterogeneous Small Christian Community from which informed, balanced and appropriate decision can be made to foster and foment co-responsibility among members. Again, this will immensely assist the Small Christian Community to dream together and pursue it to the desired logical conclusion.

The synodal process is not merely an intellectual procedure that aims at gathering data. Rather, it is an effort to improve the quality of cohesion so as to bear credible and authentic witness to the Gospel of Christ. In this regard, synodality attempts to identify the needs of individual Local Churches within the ambience of the Universal Church in order to proffer the best suited and discerned ways to surmount them with the sole purpose of forming a consolidated Church that preaches with one mind and heart. In fact, this is what a Small Christian Community should achieve in its evangelism.

Reforming the Small Christian Community in a “Synodal Church”

The Small Christian Community has made significant contributions in promoting and projecting the beauty and goodness of the Church. Testimonies of this reality abound in the African and South American Churches. Nevertheless, with the clarion call of synodality, there is much that can be achieved. Despite the fact that the challenges of Small Christian Community might vary from place to place, and different approaches introduced to deal with them, the novelty of synodality stems from the unprecedented approach to diverse issues in the Church that will eventually reduce the Universal Church to an advanced or glorified Small Christian Community. One can easily make this claim based on the fact that the synodal process covers every nook and cranny of the Church's life. It is also obvious that the laity will play vital and pivotal roles in the explorative dynamism of Vatican II Council. A devolution of power is certainly about to take place, wherein the laity will assume important offices in the Church. This is an antithesis to clericalism that has stifled the Small Christian Community.

In related development, synodality supports a cohesive spirit not only in administration but also in the proclamation of the Gospel. This is truly a renewal of baptismal promises with a composure of bearing witness as a universal dimension of Christian life through a spirit of co-responsibility. Thus, the synodal process ensures that every member in the Church matters thereby giving fair treatment to each one. Involving people in this way, shifts the boundary of individualism because private and independent lifestyle does not find any grounds in the emerging Church. Interdependency is the only

acceptable spirit that impels Church's machinery of evangelisation. For this reason, a level of consensus is expected in the decision-making process for its acceptability and application. With this approach emerging from the new mindset in the Church, the Small Christian Community would not be hijacked by the local leadership because everyone is co-responsible.

In addition, the synodal process would certainly demolish certain cultural patterns, particularly, the patriarchal tendencies. This is evident from the equal opportunity and involvement that the synodal process has introduced. Its belief that everyone has something to offer is, in itself, countercultural. The ability to offer something is not dependent on gender, race or tribe, but it is purely the work of the Holy Spirit who distributes gifts to people irrespective of their gender, class or background. The charisms of the Holy Spirit, which is not lacking in everyone, is the litmus test not of someone's worth, but what one can do. In fact, this is not only an antidote to patriarchal behaviour but against any form of segregation and discrimination. Manifestation of such behavioural patterns are recorded, especially, in African Churches. Synodality will assist the Small Christian Community with new ways to eradicate and dethrone such imbalances among its members.

Furthermore, synodality will restore the spirit of respect for anyone. A clear revelation of what God did at the dawn of creation: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). This is feasible, in the sense that, the synodal process listens to everyone. Listening is more than hearing according to Pope Francis; it is about being like God who listens to the cry of the poor. In this way, listening connotes divinization or deification of the interlocutor that obliges the hearer(s) to be obedient and to do what the person says. Certainly, this will not only radiate the godliness in each person but also its recognition in a profound way which consequently implies upholding the dignity of every human being. Upholding this in the Small Christian Community will guarantee a more united and responsible believing community. Such a community becomes the in-breaking of the eschatological presence of God.

Conclusion

It may sound naïve to make statements about the synodal process towards a "Synodal Church" at this point in time. Nevertheless, it will be a sign of ingratitude not to commend and praise the process now. After all, the taste of the pudding is in the eating. Be that as it may, synodality is a reflection of what is expedient for the Church in this millennium. Thus, the Holy Father says that this is what the Lord God expects in the contemporary Church. Since synodality demands the Church to move away from what is familiar and to embrace what is new as the Spirit unfolds the operational and relational dynamics in the different Church with a new mindset, it behooves all to be open through attentive listening with a discerning heart, free from all forms of prejudice, apathy, acedia, stereotypes, fear, worry, envy, jealousy, pride and

the likes. This means that all hands must be on deck, the little no less than great. Christians must remain prayerful, docile, respectful and recognise the charism of each other. All are wanted and equal on this journey. Each one has something to contribute. Being a blessing to the Church, the ripple effects of synodality will percolate every dimension of the Church's life. Little wonder then that the Small Christian Community, an important organ in the dissemination of the Christian faith, will be most beneficial of the synodal process. Therefore, the Church continues to stand before the Holy Spirit before, during and after the synodal process. The 'Synodal Church' is one and the only aspiration of the Church of our times. So, help us God!

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