

Feast of St. Benedict-Solemnity of the Passing of Our Holy Father Benedict
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Proverbs 2: 1-9; Ephesians 6:10-13; Matthew 19:27-29

Happy Feast Day! For some time now, the term “Synodality” has been in the air and we are asked to share what our experience can add to the understanding of what our Pope Francis is asking of us as church, as part of the presence of Christ in our world today. Last week on a rather large Zoom gathering of LCWR members, a helpful comment was made: that the Synodality conversation can be like a booster shot for the church getting into Vatican II, especially into seeing and hearing the call of the Church in the Modern World, revisiting and reintensifying *Gaudium et Spes*. Abbot Gregory Polan’s article the current ABR reflects that; he begins with the beginning of “*Gaudium et Spes*”, as he sets out to discuss Synodal elements in the Rule of Benedict, saying that these words encapsulate what it means to be a Synodal Church:

The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the (people) of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hope, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ. Indeed, nothing genuinely human fails to raise an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of (all members of the human race). United in Christ, they are led by the Holy Spirit in their journey to the Kingdom of their Father and they have welcomed the news of salvation which is meant for every man (and woman). That is why this community realizes that it is truly linked with (the human family and its history by the deepest of bonds.

Pope Francis said early on that the church ought to be a field hospital for the world; and now he calls believers to sketch out—from their understanding and experience—what that may mean. Abbot Gregory says that *Gaudium et Spes* “Introduces us to the heart of synodality, --being a church always in dialogue, truly listening with an open heart as she heeds the signs of the times, always led by the Holy Spirit.”

We find a similar expression in Benedict’s call that we “listen with the ear of our heart.” This calls us to be open to the possibility that one’s heart may be moved to change, to conversion. This call may be a considerable challenge for us—to take on this open

posture of listening with the ear of the heart—perhaps to learn to say “Maybe you’re right.” Chapter 3 then leads to the Chapter about “restraint of speech” (a recent newsletter from another Benedictine house pointed out that increased silence in Lent may help us to learn something!) and on Humility. These three chapters, together with the description about how decisions ought to be made with **counsel of** all the members and the gathered “tools of Good Works” provide the fundamental support for this rule of life: shared wisdom, good communication, and a proper sense of self, humility.

Then, Benedict goes into the organization of daily prayers, and the tasks of keeping the monastery going with shared work. He comments that if one finds a better way to get things done, then try it out. Notice he doesn’t suggest the same attitude toward the works of conversion in our life together: shared counsel, listening, and humility. He comes back in the end to the importance to community life of mutual obedience and good zeal. In God’s covenant with us, God models that loving kindness for one another—expressed in all major religions—and a good understanding to suggest for a Synodal church.

Let us prefer nothing whatever to Christ (the beloved son of God and brother to us). May Christ bring us all together to fullness of life here and hereafter.

May our church, this potential field hospital, our shared faith, strengthen us even for the concerns about nuclear weapons, climate change, and the roles of women.