

Biblical Negotiation and Synodality

Fr. Jack's Homily, August 15-16, 2026

So today, the Gospel has an example of "biblical negotiations." This woman, a Canaanite woman, has a daughter with a demon she'd like to get cast out, so the daughter could be back to herself, and so she implores Jesus. And Jesus says to her, "It's not right to take fruit from the children and give it to dogs." Kind of a rude remark. But then the woman comes back and says that even the dogs eat the scraps from the master's table. Hence, a mutual resolution. Jesus sees great faith, and the woman's daughter is healed. Everybody's happy. It's a negotiation that worked. Here she is. Thank you, sir. It's a healing. So that's a biblical negotiation.

But in the Church, we also have a process for negotiation. It's called synodality. And synodality goes way back to Chapter 15 in the Acts of the Apostles, around 48 AD. The Council of Jerusalem, where people got together in order to deal with a bit of controversy. Controversy that kind of is an echo in that second reading today from Paul. It's the idea of, "Do we accept Gentiles in the way of Jesus?" It was a major, major concern. And so the synod was called to deal with this. And out came the resolution that all are welcome. Synodality. So what is the process of synodality? And it kept going for a while in the Church, and then it fell out of use. Until Pope Paul VI, in the 1960s, picked it up again and started what's called a synod of bishops. So every few years, there would be this synod called only for bishops. They'd come together and talk about important matters. They'd need to have some kind of resolution. And then the Pope would take what they talked about and come out with some kind of a statement, a summary of it.

But then Pope Francis did a complete facelift on synodality, because he said that all baptized people have a part in coming to the truth. That nobody has the truth. We're all baptized so we can contribute to moving towards truth. Hence, a few years ago, churches throughout the world went through all this process of listening. And unfortunately, here in St. Louis, it was overshadowed by All Things New. But in some dioceses, it was a tremendous effort.

What's the process? So there's some kind of a facilitator. And normally you get in groups of five or six. And then there's a question put forward. And there's time for prayer first, silence. Then this question comes, and everyone at the table gets an opportunity to give their input. Nobody can interrupt. Nobody can comment. Nobody can rebut. Then it goes to the next person. Silence. Next person. You can pass if you want. Until everybody has had the opportunity to offer their part of the truth.

The second question then, the second round, is, "What made sense to you in the first round?" What kind of meaning did you pick up? And again, go around. Nobody gets to comment. Then there's another period of silent prayer.

The third round, important round, is, "What did you see emerging of the Holy Spirit?" That's the key. Not my ideas or your ideas, but do we sense the Holy Spirit here in this process so that we can, again, move forward and move together?

Just like in the Gospel, Jesus and the woman move together in their negotiations. What does that mean on the outside? Well, I guess for the first time in the synod in the Vatican, the bishops had to sit and listen. They weren't allowed to interrupt or to say, "That's not Church teaching." Or, "This is what Augustine said." "Thomas Aquinas." Everyone had to listen, whether you're a bishop, a priest, a psychologist. You all had to listen. So that the Spirit would have a chance to emerge. And so hopefully that process might eke into our lives, into what's going on.

Certainly the kind of conversations that are being held have nothing to do with what the Spirit emerged. They have to do with, "I want my point. I'm going to get it across." And so often when we're in discussions, we're preparing before the person finishes what we're going to say. We can't do that in the synodality. It's a process of listening, respecting the dignity and opinions of another person. And so in the early Church, the problem was Gentiles. We have difficulties now, challenges.

And the one thing that I would throw out there that we probably need to do a little synodal process on is gender ideology. It's a huge controversy in the Church, in the political realm, in psychological areas. The question is, "What does it mean to you?" Not, "What does the Church say?" Or, "What does this psychologist say?" But, "What is gender to you?" So that we can listen to one another. And then hopefully the Spirit gets closer to the truth, as opposed to saying, "My opinion is the right one."

May we in our lives hopefully approach a little bit more of a synodal process and see if it works in your family.