

HOMILY by Fr. Robin – 7th Sunday of Easter 1/06/25
“That They May Be One: The True Face of Synodality”

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Today’s readings immerse us in a beautiful but demanding vision of unity — a unity rooted in Christ and nourished by love, truth, and mission. At the same time, we are given the witness of St. Stephen, the first martyr, who models for us a Church that is both Spirit-filled and faithful unto death.

In our **first reading from Acts**, we see Stephen, “filled with the Holy Spirit,” gazing into heaven and seeing “the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God” (Acts 7:55). He is being stoned for proclaiming the truth — and yet, even in death, he is forgiving his persecutors. This is the Church in her essence: filled with the Holy Spirit, testifying to Christ, forgiving in love, and led by grace.

In the **Gospel of John**, we hear Jesus praying not only for His apostles, but for all believers: “*that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us*” (John 17:21). This unity — not uniformity, but communion — is the heart of Christ’s mission. It is the foundation of **synodality**, a word that means “*walking together.*”

Too often today, there is confusion about what **synodality** really means. Some think it means replacing one form of authority with another — removing the parish priest or bishop from their spiritual and sacramental role, and handing over all decisions to committees or majority votes. This is not the Church’s vision. Synodality is not clericalism turned upside down.

The **Catechism of the Catholic Church** teaches that “the Church is both visible and spiritual, a hierarchical society and the Mystical Body of Christ” (CCC 779). This means there is a sacred order willed by Christ: bishops, priests, deacons, and the laity, all walking together — not in rivalry, but in **complementarity**.

St. Ignatius of Antioch, writing in the early 2nd century, said: “*Let everyone respect the deacons as Jesus Christ, the bishop as a type of the Father, and the presbyters as the council of God and the college of the Apostles. Without these, there is no Church.*” (Letter to the Trallians, 3)

Likewise, the Second Vatican Council affirms in *Lumen Gentium* that while the laity are called to participate actively in the Church’s life and mission, this is

done **in communion with their pastors**, who are not mere administrators but **shepherds appointed by Christ**.

Synodality, then, is not a power struggle. It is a **spiritual process of listening, discerning, and walking forward together**, with each person — lay, religious, ordained — offering their unique gift for the good of the whole Body.

The parish priest is not the obstacle to synodality — he is a key servant of it. As the Council of Trent taught, and as the CCC reminds us, the priest is *“in the person of Christ the Head”* during the Eucharist (CCC 1548). The priest is not above the community but is ordained to serve it — to teach, to sanctify, and to govern, as Christ Himself did.

The laity, on the other hand, are not passive recipients. As CCC 900 says: *“Since, like all the faithful, lay persons are entrusted by God with the apostolate by virtue of their Baptism and Confirmation, they have the right and duty to work so that the divine message of salvation may be known and accepted by all people throughout the earth.”*

So what does real synodality look like in a parish? It looks like parishioners who pray, listen, and participate with charity. It looks like pastoral councils that offer wisdom and support, not opposition. It looks like priests who welcome consultation, but do not abandon their duty to lead in faith. And above all, it looks like **unity in Christ**.

As Jesus says in today’s Gospel, “I have given them the glory you gave me, so that they may be one, as we are one” (John 17:22). The glory of the Church is not in its structures, but in its **communion in love and truth**.

In the **Book of Revelation**, the Risen Lord declares, *“Behold, I am coming soon”* (Rev 22:12). Our mission is urgent. We are not called to form power blocs but to be **pilgrims of hope**, bearing witness to Christ in a divided world.

St. Augustine once said: *“In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity.”* That is the heart of synodality: not competition, but collaboration; not ideology, but identity in Christ.

Let us then walk together as a parish, as a diocese, and as a universal Church — in trust, in obedience to the Holy Spirit, and in joyful communion with one another. Let us not seek power, but grace. Let us not grasp authority, but live in charity. And let us always remember: **the Church belongs to Christ**, not to us.

Amen.