



**EPARCHY OF SAINT MARON OF BROOKLYN
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Dear Brother Priests, Deacons and Subdeacons, Consecrated Men and Women, Lay Faithful,

Last Sunday, Pope Francis initiated a two-year process leading up to a meeting of the Synod of Bishops in Rome that will focus on the theme “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission.”

The word “synod” comes from two Greek words meaning “to journey together.” During his homily, the Holy Father invited us to share in the adventure of a journey.

Today, as we begin this synodal process, let us begin by asking ourselves – all of us, Pope, bishops, priests, religious and laity – whether we, the Christian community, embody this “style” of God, who travels the paths of history and shares in the life of humanity. Are we prepared for the adventure of this journey? Or are we fearful of the unknown, preferring to take refuge in the usual excuses: “It’s useless” or “We’ve always done it this way”?

To be truly “synodal,” to journey together, Pope Francis tells us that it is necessary that we *encounter* each other.

As we initiate this process, we too are called to become experts in the art of encounter. Not so much by organizing events or theorizing about problems, as in taking time to encounter the Lord and one another. Time to devote to prayer and to adoration – that form of prayer that we so often neglect – devoting time to adoration, and to hearing what the Spirit wants to say to the Church. Time to look others in the eye and listen to what they have to say, to build rapport, to be sensitive to the questions of our sisters and brothers, to let ourselves be enriched by the variety of charisms, vocations, and ministries. Every encounter – as we know – calls for openness, courage, and a willingness to let ourselves be challenged by the presence and the stories of others.

We must learn to *listen*

Are we good at listening? How good is the “hearing” of our heart? Do we allow people to express themselves, to walk in faith even though they have had difficulties in life, and to be part of the life of the community without being

hindered, rejected or judged? Participating in a Synod means placing ourselves on the same path as the Word made flesh. It means following in his footsteps, listening to his word along with the words of others.

Pope Francis continues that we cannot stop with *encounter* and *listening*. We must also *discern*.

Encounter and listening are not ends in themselves, leaving everything just as it was before. On the contrary, whenever we enter into dialogue, we allow ourselves to be challenged, to advance on a journey. . . The Synod is a process of spiritual discernment, of ecclesial discernment, that unfolds in adoration, in prayer and in dialogue with the Word of God.

Our Eparchy, along with our Patriarch, Bechara Peter Cardinal Rai, and the entire Maronite Church, will join Pope Francis on this journey of encounter, listening and discernment. I ask each parish to participate in the Synodal process in the manner they wish, especially by encountering, listening and discerning the pastoral needs of the community. I will do the same with the following Eparchial institutions and advisory bodies:

The Presbyteral Council
The Finance Council
Pastoral Council
The Stewardship Committee
Young Adult Leaders
Catechists
Deacons and Subdeacons
The Maronite Seminary

The Order of Saint Sharbel
The National Apostolate of Maronites
The Pro-Life and Family Life Team
The Eparchial Vocation Team
The Eparchial Review Board
The Interfaith-Ecumenical Team
Consecrated Monks and Sisters
The Eparchial Synodal Prep Team

I have asked Chorbishop John D. Faris to assist me in this process. I thus ask each person to learn more about this important two-year event, and to feel free to contact me, Chorbishop Faris, or anyone in the above-named Eparchial entities. Let us truly be a “synodal” Church and journey together in order to be the Church that God wants us to be.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ 
+ Gregory

GJM/rb