Saints and Synods:
a call to reflect on the Church on the Solemnity of All Saints 2026

Blessed are you!

The Beatitudes offer the charter for Christian life, the new life of grace, and can be considered as a "self-portrait of Christ", which should be the mirror we look at as we seek to grow in holiness, and to be conformed to Him. It's our roadmap to heaven; the way we are called to live if we want to become the people whom God intends us to be; to be counted among the Blessed in that immense crowd impossible to count…

Synod

In 2021, the late **Pope Francis** addressed an appeal to the whole Church, the holy people of God to walk together. And so words like "synod" and "synodality" became part of the vocabulary of the Church, indeed the *first* American pope saw this an important element for the Church in our times, for all members to seek to understand more fully - and most especially live more deeply - our ***communion, participation and mission*** – the pillars of the synodal path, all of which stem from our baptism, when God called us to be part of his holy people, incorporating us into Christ priest, prophet and king. Incidentally, as you came into church and signed yourself with holy water in the porch, you made at once a profession of faith and a statement: this is what I am signed up for – communion, participation and mission.

Why was Pope Francis so intent on impressing this on the Church? It was in part, I believe, born out of his own experience as a religious, priest and bishop, in contexts where the ratio of priests to people is much lower, and where it is quite unrealistic to expect the priest to be at the centre of and on top of everything, but most especially for what he would describe as **epochal change**; a favourite theme of his to which he would return again and again. Pope Francis argued that **we are not simply living through a change of era, but rather epochal change**.

Take a moment to consider the rapidly evolving world in which we live: from globalization to one-click buying at any time of the day or night; technological advances, often spurred on by greed, selfishness and rampant consumerism as some of the poorest slide into destitution and oblivion or drown as they fall from overcrowded dinghies; children and women bought and sold as commodities. Politics losing its way and its vocation to be an expression of charity in the service of the common good, and is instead weaponized…Moral decision making based on emotions and superficial criteria rather than objective truth, as younger generations are swept along in a tide of confusion, leading some to question their very identity as anthropology is bracketed and educational programs/propaganda control minds rather than training people to be open to the truth and beauty… The anxious generation does not know where to turn, and often finds itself in violent protests, or hidden in isolated scrolling: they are hurting, they are angry, but very often they don't know why…

A rather bleak picture, on a cold November morning, I know! Yet this is the world in which the Church makes her pilgrim journey with the same message and the same goal. It's here that we are called to shine as lights and become the saints whom God is calling us to be! It's here that we must hand on the faith, despite the fact that so many young people have walked away. It's hardly surprising if their faith formation ended at primary school, how did we expect them to be equipped to love the faith and live out its demands in contemporary society? How would you yourself deal with an aggressive atheist or even a gently spoken Jehovah's witness trying to persuade you that you have got it all wrong?

So, Pope Francis called a synod. He called us to walk together in **communion, participation and mission**. For some, there was a bit of fear, as if we were opening Pandora's box. For many, the call was met with indifference, while for others it unleashed new enthusiasm to make their voices heard. I know that in this parish many of you engaged in discussions and reflected on the Church and its mission, wanting to better understand

your place and get involved. And now, 2 years after the publication of the final document, which the synod produced, where are we? At this point we are being asked to look at the fruits of synodality, the positive steps taken and the challenges encountered along the way…

A call to pray and to listen

We are being asked to do this of course, in **a reflective and prayerful manner**, just as the synod's methodology was **conversation in the Spirit**, we are being called to do the same, alone or in small groups – **after a time of prayer and silence** - to reflect, and if you feel so called to use the questions, which I have made available on the parish website for guidance.

When we speak of being open to the Spirit, we are speaking of **the Holy Spirit**, the same who proceeds from the Father and the Son, the one who gives life to the Church. **We always need to test the spirits**, lest we be blown about by the winds of strange doctrine, to use the expression of St Paul. **So, prayer must come first!** But our reflection and our engagement with the process must also **come from a place of love for the Church**. **Do *I* love the Church?** Do I believe that her divine founder has given her all the means necessary for our sanctification? Or do I view the Church as an organization like any other corporation or simply a human institution? That would really be an impoverished way to look at the Church, for she is like her Head and Spouse both human *and* divine. "One complex reality", to borrow the expression from the Second Vatican Council. We cannot say this is where the human stops and the divine begins, they are contiguous and continuous for **the Church is a mystery**. So, while we are ***called to listen to the Spirit***, we must do so ***cum Ecclesia***, as St Ignatius Loyola reminds us: **we listen with the Church.**

The Church in every age is in need of reform, *semper reformanda est*, as the theologians say, but where and how does that reform and renewal come about? **With the saints.** They point to the Source of Renewal: **Jesus Christ,**

the same yesterday, today and forever. It is the saints in every age who help the Church stay true to her mission…

Synodality is **not a mechanism to alter Catholic doctrine** – for that would be a betrayal of her nature and her mission - n**or does it seek to democratize Church structures**, with its charisms and ministries given by our Lord…

Change and adaptations come, and will continue to do so, but that does not mean that everything is suddenly up for grabs, we are not "*singing a new Church into being*" – that has been tried and the effects are all too familiar – it is rather **putting the emphasis on the fact that every member of the Church— the whole people of God - priests, laity, bishops, families, and missionaries, young and old—has a specific role and voice to contribute to the common mission**: to know and love God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent. Let this be our guiding principle and help us to listen, to learn and where appropriate to share this.

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St Werburgh's, Chester. 1 November 2026.