

THE VISITATION

! "The Visitation" is now digital! Visit fraternityofpriests.org to sign up to receive this newsletter via email and to access our online donation form. This will help the Fraternity of Priests be more efficient and to simplify costs as we enter the new year.

Synodal Perspectives in Trinidad - By Fr. Dwight Merrick, Trinidad and Tobago Fraternity

When I was producing the local broadcast of Vatican Radio in Boston, I remember the words of Sean Patrick Lovett who is the Director of the English Programme. He said that any news he wanted to gather in the world, he could just call a local member of a parish or missionary or priest and get the information from the ground there.

This is one fascinating reality about the Fraternity of Priests, we have Fraternities in several countries including those in Africa, Eastern Europe and today we hear from Fr. Dwight Merrick. He is giving us a perspective of the synod from the ground in Trinidad and Tobago.

He wrote in previous articles about his daily ministry in that country, which is often different than what we experience in our ministries. However, as you will read his diocese has been involved in a synod process for decades. He will give to us his experience about what his parishioners are saying there which may be different than what is being said in our own home countries.

One of the fascinating realities about the Synod is that it is about listening and processing what people hear. This means that in Rome there are voices coming from different parts of the world that all believe the same doctrine but their cultural differences reflect a total different understanding of ministry.

Africans see the needs of the

Church differently than Asians who see the needs differently than those in North America who see them differently than South Americans.

In fact, I believe the whole synod process comes from the South America perspective of the Pope who works with a different experience of Church than we do here in North America. All of this comes together to share the one faith but as Father Dwight explains we have to come together in the faith even if our cultures are different.

So Vatican Radio explains that Rome is a crossroad of all nations. Here we can see some perspectives from some of them and in this month's article we can read about the perspective of the Synod from Trinidad and Tobago. —ed.

Synod is surely on the lips of Catholics and non-Catholics alike in Trinidad and Tobago. Following are a few of the major challenges facing the Catholic Church in Trinidad and Tobago emerging out of the ongoing Synod on Synodality.

1. At inception, the image given to represent this Synod was a large ear followed by the word "Listen". Each parish was charged with gathering comments from parishioners. Given pressing deadlines, the views of very few were sent off to 'central command' before most people knew what was happening. Significantly, special groups were afforded meetings by the organizing committee to record

their views and concerns. Hearing of this, many lay persons are concerned about bias present in the methodology employed at least in Trinidad.

2. At a recent prayer meeting at my own parish, a question raised was "what more does the lgbtq group want?" Among Catholics gathering at Holy Mass or wherever, there must be members of lgbtq already. They are at clergy and lay Catholic gatherings contributing to the life of the Catholic church. The fear some persons now hold is, what more do they want? Is it that they want to advertise their status at church gatherings? If so, then many Catholics in Trinidad are surely going to be shopping around for a new parish or absenting themselves altogether.

3. Following from the last point, comes the issue of cultural differences. Recent attempts to pressure leaders of African countries to embrace lgbtq issues, brought an emphatic rejection of this agenda. Like Trinidad, it seems like the African continent as a whole is not prepared to open its arms to greater visibility and recognition of lgbtq issues and persons. Greater efforts to force this issue upon Trinidad's Catholics therefore, may well disgrudge or chase away practicing Catholics.

4. Another interesting observation is that the focus of the Synod at the Vatican during October 2023, were precisely those written about by the Holy Father long before the start of

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Dear Fraternity Brothers and Friends of the Priesthood

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One of the objectives for the Fraternity of Priests is to inform our donors about the ongoing financial health and details of the organization. We thank those many faithful benefactors who help make our service possible. Thank you!

Fraternity Financial Report

Monthly Budget:
\$4,750.00

Actual Donations:
\$1,462.00

Budget Deficit:
\$3,288.00

Current as of
November 30, 2023.

My hope and prayer are that each of you experienced a faith filled and blessed Advent/Christmas season. We celebrated once more the generosity of God in giving us His own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ to be our Savior. Hopefully we invited the Lord to draw closer to us and to enable us to draw closer to each other in the family of God. Presently we are making a brief stop in Ordinary Time with its green vestments and very soon we head into the purple of the Holy Season of Lent.

As we begin this New Year, please reflect on two of the Fraternity Disciplines – Numbers 9 and 10: *To proclaim the Visitation Message* and *To empower God's people in the Holy Spirit*. Both disciplines focus on the presence and work of the Holy Spirit. The Visitation Message proclaims that God is active today in the Church and in the world pouring out His Holy Spirit as in a New Pentecost. To empower God's people in the Holy Spirit means that we ourselves are growing in the gifts of the Holy Spirit and ministering in the power of that same Spirit. Is this true for each of us and is it happening in our lives, in our ministries, and in our Fraternity groups?

At present in our Boston group we are reading and reflecting on a book by Patrick Reis entitled *Supernatural Saints – A School of Ministry from the Saints*. The book highlights six saints who lived and ministered supernaturally in the power of the Holy Spirit: St. Vincent Ferrer, St. Philip Neri, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Francis Xavier, St. Padre Pio, and St. Serephim of Sarov. The author draws practical lessons from each of these

saints, lessons that can help us to minister in the Holy Spirit. It is a book that can build up and renew our faith in the power of God.

Patrick Reis along with

Fr. Mathias Thelen are the founders of Encounter Ministries. Encounter Ministries, as stated on its website, exists to unleash the transforming power of the Holy Spirit in the world through teaching, equipping, and activating disciples to demonstrate the love of God through the power of the Holy Spirit. Several of our Fraternity brothers in various groups have attended the Encounter School of Ministry and/or participated in an Encounter Conference. The Encounter vision certainly fits with the vision and mission of the Fraternity of Priests. Let me encourage both you, my brother priests, and our lay supports to consult the website of Encounter Ministries – www.encounterministries.us There you will find information about this ministry and some important and relevant teachings and videos.

If we find that we are depending less on the action of the Spirit and moving away from our former zeal, now is the time to seek again and to pray with one another to be filled with the Holy Spirit as we enter this new year and bring the love of Jesus to our broken world and divided Church. Come, Holy Spirit!



Fr. John Kiley



Editor's Note: Please send articles, comments, and photos to the our editor, Fr. Bob Carr, via e-mail to editor@fraternityofpriests.org. Newsletter material from all Fraternity members is gratefully accepted.

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this Synod on Synodality in 2021. Many persons find this a strange coincidence. From his very first encyclical, there was a call to embrace those who feel ignored or rejected by the Catholic church. As a pastor, I have since improved my ministry to those in such situations.

5. Cardinal Muller reported after the recent Synod gathering at the Vatican, that this Synod is all about telling us to accept homosexuality, women priests and homosexual unions. Recent suggestions from the Holy Father encourage the blessing of such unions but only a few months ago, he indicated such blessings were not even possible. These controversies are creating deep divisions among Catholics in Trinidad and probably the entire Catholic world.

6. In my country Trinidad and Tobago, our Catholic church started a Synod in 1999 which was interrupted for 1 year, then resumed resulting in large synod gatherings in 2003, 2005 and 2009. Then the implementation phase was ignored for 7 years by a new bishop and only revisited just before this Synod on Synodality began in 2021. On 18th November 2023, at yet another Synod gathering of church leaders, we were told that this process will continue for another four years. In a nutshell, the Catholic church in Trinidad and Tobago from 1999 to 2027 i.e. 28 years, are in one prolonged talkshop with little implementation to date. Already, many clergy and laity are worn down and disillusioned by the rhetoric about renewing our church. I imagine other people at dioceses around the world may be experiencing similar frustrations.

7. One of my most disturbing

thoughts about this Synod and all the Synods and Church assemblies over the last forty years in Trinidad and Tobago, relates to aims and objectives.

It is quite discomfoting to me that creating a brand-new mission for the church does not strike us as strange. If one compares this to private business the difference is quite glaring. Businesses exist fundamentally to make money while providing some service. The service being provided is abundantly clear to all stakeholders and all employees know exactly how their job has to play its part toward this end. If a business seeks to sell tyres, then slogans may change, advertisements may change, but these always stick to the crystal clear focus; selling tyres.

Here lays what to my mind is among our most critical challenges in the Catholic Church. The numerous synods and assemblies seeking renewal which take place regularly all over the world, each create its own "mission" for their local church. This, I humbly suggest, reflects a huge problem within our Universal church. From diocese to diocese across the Catholic world, we do not have a unified vision for our existence and thus an unshakable, well defined, universally accepted and agreed upon, Mission for the Catholic Church!

The result is that each individual Catholic diocese is pulling its oars in its own direction with absolutely no compulsion to agreed upon aims and objectives. Imagine those Olympic races with teams of persons with oars in the water guided by a captain shouting commands and keeping timing at the helm. What would happen if team members ignored the captain whenever they felt like it?

Now this resembles our One Universal Catholic church comprising numerous different dioceses, each doing its own thing. This ongoing practice is doomed to fail and is in fact failing in many parts of the world.

Just recall the down-sizing of dioceses in Pennsylvania for instance along with the shocking absence of Catholics from the Sunday mass obligation in most parts of the world. Here in Trinidad, only 11% of registered Roman Catholics attend weekend Mass/service in March 2023. Checks around the world indicate that even before but especially after the pandemic, Catholic mass attendance continues falling to all time lows. This to my mind should demand great attention from every Catholic bishop especially when other denominations seem to be growing.

May I humbly submit that we are unauthorized and remain misguided whenever we create our own mission for church. Jesus gave His Church its mission! Maybe we need to just humbly ourselves and seek to do it- Go make disciples of all nations, baptize them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit and teach them everything I taught you, and know that I will be with you always Mt 28: 16- 20. Is it possible that the mess we are in as church is frankly the consequence of disobedience? Who authorized any church leader, to redefine the mission of Jesus' church after He had clearly given its mission? Is it too much or too late for us to collectively repent and return to doing the work of the Lord His way?

Our answers to all church challenges begin with prayer. May we continue facing every challenge with prayer, trusting in the goodness of the Lord.

Please send us your prayer intentions: _____

THANK YOU FOR PRAYING FOR A PRIEST EACH DAY!

February 2024						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1 For the souls of our deceased FOP members	2 For prayer requests received	3 For our Holy Father, Pope Francis
Rev. 4 Edward Littelmann <i>Toledo, OH</i>	Rev. 5 Nicholas Weibl <i>Toledo, OH</i>	Rev. 6 Dale Branson <i>Tucson, AZ</i>	Rev. 7 Isaac Fynn <i>Tucson, AZ</i>	Rev. 8 John Gonzales <i>Tucson, AZ</i>	Rev. 9 James Hobert <i>Tucson, AZ</i>	Rev. 10 Bill Kohler <i>Tucson, AZ</i>
Rev. 11 Liam Leahy <i>Tucson, AZ</i>	Rev. Msgr. 12 Domenico Pinti <i>Tucson, AZ</i>	Rev. 13 Thomas Quirk <i>Tucson, AZ</i>	Rev. 14 Ray Ratzenberger <i>Tucson, AZ</i>	Most Rev. 15 Vitalij Skomarovski <i>Ukraine</i>	Rev. 16 Bennette Tang Becheyie <i>Wa, West Africa</i>	Rev. 17 Stephen Dassah <i>Wa, West Africa</i>
Rev. 18 John Bosco Eledi <i>Wa, West Africa</i>	Rev. 19 Paul Gaa <i>Wa, West Africa</i>	Rev. 20 Victor Ganaa <i>Wa, West Africa</i>	Rev. 21 Stephen Kantubog <i>Wa, West Africa</i>	Rev. 22 Aloysius Kpiebaya <i>Wa, West Africa</i>	Rev. 23 Cletus Kulah <i>Wa, West Africa</i>	Rev. 24 Chrisantus Kulbile <i>Wa, West Africa</i>
Rev. 25 Vincent Kuubatge <i>Wa, West Africa</i>	Rev. 26 Godfrey Naagyie <i>Wa, West Africa</i>	Rev. 27 Sylvester Nankpi <i>Wa, West Africa</i>	Rev. 28 James Nasaalbeteryeb <i>Wa, West Africa</i>	Rev. 29 Nicodemus Nongnenuor <i>Wa, West Africa</i>		

A PRAYER FOR PRIESTS

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O Jesus, Eternal High Priest, live in (name of priest), act in him, speak in and through him. Think your thoughts in his mind, love through his heart. Give him your own disposition and feelings. Teach, lead and guide him always. Correct, enlighten and expand his thoughts and behavior. Possess his soul, take over his entire personality and life. Replace him with yourself. Incline him to constant adoration and thanksgiving; pray in and through him. Let him live in you and keep him in this intimate union always.

O Mary, Immaculate Conception, Mother of Jesus and Mother of priests, pray and intercede for (.....). Amen.

Please cut and return this form with your donation.

Dear Fr. John Kiley,

This donation is to help the Fraternity of Priests in continuing their work of ministering to priests.

\$10 \$25 \$50 \$100 Other \$ _____

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