

Synod: Key Term #3

The infallible belief of the faithful: What is the *sensus fidei fidelium*?

One of the reasons that Pope Francis has been emphasizing synodality is that he wishes to better recognize and utilize all the gifts of all the people in the Church. Most of us know that the Magisterium of the Church (the teaching office of the Church exercised by the Pope and the bishops), under certain conditions, can teach infallibly. But the faithful members of Christ's Church also have a corresponding gift. We can believe infallibly. Ideally these two gifts should inform and reinforce each other.

This gift of the Holy Spirit is called the *sensus fidei fidelium*: The understanding of the Faith by the Faithful. Everyone who is baptized is anointed with the Holy Spirit, and this anointing is strengthened by the Sacrament of Confirmation. By the grace of the Spirit, the People of God as a whole does not err in faith, even when it cannot adequately explain the faith. The more faithful a Christian is – participating in the Sacraments, building their relationship with God, feeling with the heart of the Church – the better of an instinct they will have for the True Faith. When we are open to Him, God gives us an intuition about divine realities. And when the entire People of God manifests a belief of faith or morals, that belief cannot be wrong, because the Holy Spirit would not allow the entire Church to go into error.

The *sensus fidei* cannot be determined by majority vote. History shows that individuals and groups in the Church, whether members of the faithful or bishops, can very easily fall into error and sin. The more separated a person is from God and His Church, the less likely they will be to instinctively recognize the truths of the Faith — and we have all sinned and fallen short (Romans 3:23). However, if the faithful stubbornly cling to some belief or obstinately refuse to accept another, for a long time and in many places, even in the face of opposition and persecution, that should be a sign to the Magisterium of the *sensus fidei* at work.

What is the Synod on Synodality?

Pope Francis has asked the entire world to participate in a synod on the topic “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission.” The central question he asks of everyone is:

A synodal Church, in announcing the Gospel, “journeys together.” How is this “journeying together” happening today in our diocese? What steps does the Spirit invite us to take in order to grow in our “journeying together”?

You may be invited to participate in listening sessions at your local parish, or you may wish to give your input online. Participation in a synod should always involve prayer, listening, discussion, and above all, discerning the way that the Holy Spirit is guiding us. Hopefully these questions and answers can help you as you prepare your input.

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