

FIRST SYNOD MEMBER MEETING HOMILY

In the Gospel today Jesus tells us a story that carries a warning against becoming too self-satisfied.

At the obvious level it is about an individual but in the context of our Synod it might also be interpreted with a communal element. The story that Jesus tells is one of total self absorption. We hear of a man who is talking to himself. There is no reference outside of himself to God or the community.

Let's allow our imaginations to picture the man of this parable. Perhaps he believes he is a self-made success- he looks in the mirror each morning and he is pretty happy with what he sees. But all this is about to come crashing down. It is a good story we can trace the build-up of alienation, this poor rich man, through his self-centeredness gets more and more lost as the story goes on.

In the first line of the story we hear that the harvest is from his land- but that is a gift surely. The land – God's creation given to us to tend and care for. However the man acknowledges no such gift- it is his land and his harvest.

Then we hear the beginning of his remarkable monologue- he is talking to no one but himself, he is listening to no one- totally self absorbed. "What am I to do with my crops? I will build bigger barns I will store my grain and my goods in them".

Next he is so deluded that he begins to speak to his very inner self. Soul, soul he says again referencing only himself. "Soul ...you have plenty of good things laid by for many years to come; take things easy, eat, drink, have a good time". There is no room for God in all this man's clutter of self-talk and stockpiling. He creates no space to allow God to speak into his soul.

If he were to allow God to speak to his soul he might just come to see that life is a gift: that humans are made for one another and that we are all dependent on a God of love and mercy.

There is a message in all of this for our Church as we embark on our synodal journey.

First, it must not be an exercise in self absorption. Our synod cannot be a journey that is all about our asset management or stockpiling or building up some sort of Catholic country club that seeks to benefit its members only.

Rather it must be an exercise in listening; in seeking the presence and the voice of God. It must be an exercise that says the Good News of Jesus Christ is not our personal or Catholic Church treasure. It is destined for all of humanity and all of God's creation.

And so we need to pay special attention to voices that may not find themselves in this room.

We need to seek the voices of those who have never heard of the Good News of Jesus Christ; those who have heard it but have been so hurt by the institutional church that they no longer find a place of safety and welcome here. We need to hear those who are poor and ashamed and in need, like all of us, of God's healing.

We need to listen too, to the voice of creation that cries out to us in rising oceans and global warming that threaten some of the most beautiful and delicate ecosystems. God's beautiful creation destined for all humanity in generations to come.

My prayer is that our Synod will make us a brave and bold Church, prepared to leave the safety of our established places to go out into our world to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ to all humanity. I pray too that it might make us a humble and listening church ready to discern the directions of the Holy Spirit in those voices at the margins- the cries of the poor, the sighs of our Earth and the hopes of our children for lives of meaning and purpose.

Our Synod will help us to make space to hear these voices and through our deep listening to allow the voice of God to convert us so that we might come to see more and more that all life is a gift from God; that we are all made for one another and that we are all dependent on our God of love and mercy, forgiveness and hope.

