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A Reflection on the Synod on Synodality – Bishop David L. Ricken, DD, JCL

Throughout the Synod on Synodality worldwide listening process, I have been impressed with the depth of sharing from Catholics and non-Catholics alike. As I read through the sharing and synodal summary reports, one thing stands out to me, people are hurting. People are experiencing unprecedented anxiety, stress, pain, post pandemic effects and the list goes on. Yet amidst such pain and brokenness, I see joy and hope in Jesus Christ and in the Church. The synodal responses cover the full spectrum of topics and opinions, which is to be expected when you seek to listen on such a wide scale.

As I read the reports and listen to people sharing, I, like most everyone else, want to help people in need. We want to lighten their burden so they can experience the hope, love and peace of Jesus Christ. Throughout the remainder of the synodal process and to do this most effectively, we have to look to Jesus Christ Himself to see how He responded to pain, sin and confusion.

The Gospels are clear - Jesus embraced those who suffered, he taught them a new way to live and invites them to follow Him. Often in the Scriptures we see the apostles and other disciples, repenting of and giving up their old ways, to learn to live in the new way of Christ. This is sometimes a long (a lifetime) and difficult journey, but one that Jesus walks closely with each and every one of his disciples. Our sins do not cause Christ to leave us. In the face of Peter's denial, the woman caught in adultery, his encounter with tax collectors, Jesus invites them to repent of their sin and former ways of doing things and to follow Him and live differently in true freedom. A freedom only found in following the life and teaching of Jesus Christ.

When faced with another's burdens, difficulties and sins; we are sometimes tempted to lighten their load by softening the teaching of Jesus or changing it (even if ever so slightly) so that the other can feel better about their situation. While this may seemingly offer short term relief, it leads to long term entrapment to the burden, difficulty or sin. Jesus came to take our sinfulness upon Himself and take it to the cross. For us to participate in the saving effects of this self-giving love on the cross, we simply have to admit our sin as sin, repent of it and ask Jesus to free us from our sinful inclinations and actions. This is often a process, and I am grateful that Christ instituted the Sacrament of Reconciliation as an opportunity to regularly repent and experience His healing forgiveness and love.

As I read the Synod reports and reactions to the synodal process, I pray that we as a Church will respond to each person the Lord leads to us with humility and courage. Humility to place their wants and needs ahead of ours to accompany them in their journey of life and courage to love them enough speak the Truth of Jesus Christ into their lives and situation. For Jesus clearly said, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14: 6). I pray that we as a Church, and in a particular way the bishops, will truly listen to the needs and cries of all God's people. To hear their desperate yearning to be deeply and truly valued as human persons in the loving embrace of their Savior Jesus Christ. I pray that we bishops and priests have the courage to boldly and faithfully proclaim the love and teachings of Christ to a world that desperately needs Him.

In this Synodal process, let us all share the truth and teachings of Jesus Christ and His Church lovingly and unambiguously. May we all grow in our reading of Sacred Scripture and the Catechism of the Catholic Church so we can more effectively share Christ. It is only in truly experiencing the life, death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ and personally accepting Him and the Gospel into our broken and wounded lives that He save us, heals us and leads us to true freedom in this life and in the next.