

# Synod: What's in a name?

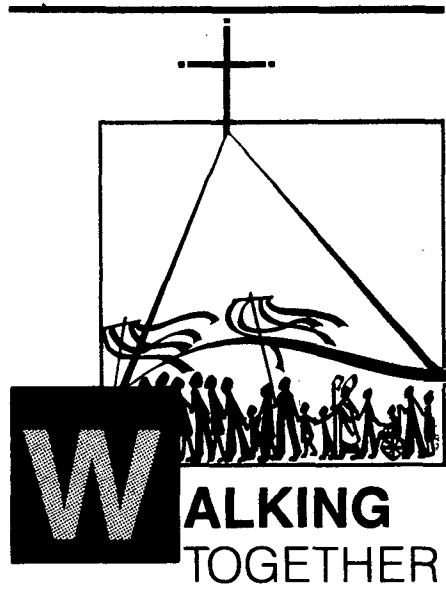
By Father Joseph A. Hart  
Guest contributor

Synod is a Greek word that originally meant "walking together." The early church borrowed the word to describe the process it used to reach consensus in solving problems or clarify teaching. The church's early leaders would call a synod — a meeting — at which representatives of various local churches would "walk together" for a while, discussing concerns as friends talk to friends.

During these meetings, the early Christians noticed that no matter how strongly one party or another was wedded to a particular position at the beginning of their meeting, the gathering always reached consensus. Their experience convinced them that this was the work of the Spirit of God, who walked along with them.

The Scriptures themselves support this conviction. In describing the outcome of the first synod, the *Acts of the Apostles* (22:28) tells us that the apostles and elders wrote to the distant churches announcing, "The Holy Spirit and we have decided ..."

"The Holy Spirit and we" sound so presumptuous to us, so arrogant.



And yet that was precisely their experience.

That experience has been felt again in our lifetime. Before Bishop James E. Kearney and his Auxiliary Bishop Lawrence Casey left Rochester for the Second Vatican Council, Bishop Casey told the priests of the diocese that he would be voting for nothing new.

When he returned, he confessed that he had voted for all that was to be new. By way of explanation he told the priests that he was not the same bishop who left for Europe

several months before. He had been profoundly changed. Again and again Bishop Casey told the priests and people of his new diocese in Patterson, N.J., that it was the tangible presence of the Holy Spirit in the council that touched him in the very core of his being and changed the course of his life.

With my own ears I heard Bishop Casey testify that when the Church "walked together" in council, one could feel the Holy Spirit walking along with it.

Perhaps it is because we are products of a scientific age or have grown cynical because of the exorbitant claims of various sects or grown disillusioned through the frauds of televangelism that we do not trust claims about the action of the Holy Spirit in our lives or in the life of the church. Despite our hesitancy, the church invites us to trust once again in what the Spirit's power can accomplish in our midst.

Beginning the week of Sept. 20, our 12-county diocese will start on a yearlong journey, walking together, talking as friends talk to friends. In two weeks, the Seventh Synod of the Diocese of Rochester will begin to plan its future in parish or community, regional and finally general synod discussions.

The cynical view would hold that this is just one more series of meetings, one more process, one more silly exercise in futility.

But for those who know our history — who understand the power of God's Spirit when a local Church comes together — the possibilities are very great indeed.

There is a bit of uncertainty in all of this. There's more than a little risk. Beyond the excitement of the moment, there's some real fear of being led where we may not want to go. But if we truly trust in God and approach these meetings with ears open to God's voice in the Christian voices around us, then the Spirit of God will not fail us.

In outlining his plan for the synod, Bishop Clark has written, "We will radically depend on God's Spirit, working through the prayer and wisdom of the whole community ... We will need, with God's unfailing help, to act carefully and reflectively, surrendering ourselves to what we discern Christ most asks of us at this time in history and in this place."

And so as we all start down the road together — bishops and laity, clergy and religious — we whisper a final prayer: "Come Spirit of God, walk with us ... for the night is dark

## Like God, we should seek out the lost

By Father Albert Shamon  
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 15:1-32; (R1) Exodus 32:7-11, 13-14; (R2) 1 Timothy 1:12-17.

The theme for Sunday's readings is mercy, which is love stooping down to lift up.

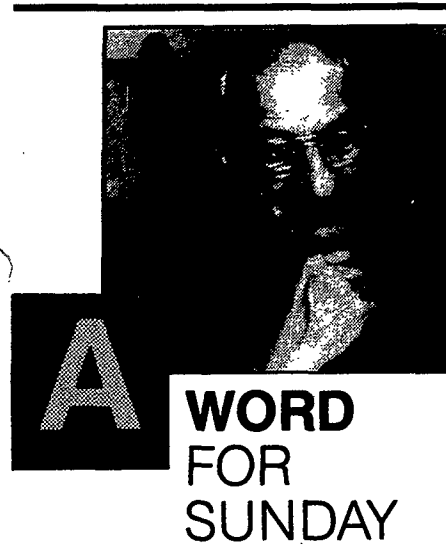
Mercy means having a heart for others' miseries and doing something about it.

The world's greatest misery is sin. Yet God is merciful, because He always does something about sin — He forgives the sinner.

Exodus is the story of how God freed His people from horrible slavery in Egypt. Yet after having done this, His people promptly forgot Him and turned to false gods. God was moved to destroy them, but Moses prayed for them.

What happened? God forgave and forgot as if nothing had happened. No wonder the psalmist says He is compassionate toward all his works (144:9).

St. Paul once persecuted the church. He himself says that he was a blasphemer, a persecutor, a man filled with arrogance, yet he was



treated mercifully and God's grace was given him in overflowing measure because "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

Luke's beautiful 15th chapter tells us three parables exemplifying God's mercy toward the lost. People can get lost in one of three ways.

Some get lost like sheep. They nibble themselves lost. Sheep never defy the shepherd. They just wander

along nibbling, heedless of danger, seeing one tuft of grass here and another there, never looking up to see where they are going. They often end up on some dangerous mountain ledge or in a swamp.

Some Catholics are like that. They just go on and on living day in and day out, preoccupied with the business of life and oblivious of the after-life. Neglecting daily prayers, Mass and monthly confession, they are soon lost to the faith.

Sometimes people get lost through others' neglect, like the coin. This happens when parents neglect their children's religious education.

It also happens when there are no family prayers, no sacred images in the home, no good example.

Society is often at fault for tolerating pornography and an irresponsible media that glorifies crime and criminals, lust and violence.

Finally, some people get lost, because — like the prodigal — they want their own way.

God seeks the first two kinds of people who get lost because for them, He is a "hound of heaven." But the prodigals need to seek God. Their problem is heart trouble. They

need inner healing, like the prodigal. That is why we must pray for such sinners.

Like God, we too must be merciful and seek the lost. We hear a lot about evangelization today. Simply, evangelization means seeking the lot.

Perhaps too much emphasis is being placed on the church community and not enough on the unchurched community — the lost. Yet Jesus's last command was to go teach all nations and make disciples of them.

We might learn a lesson from the honeybee.

Flowers can't spread their seeds by themselves, which is where the honeybee comes in. The honeybee needs the nectar inside the flowers to make honey.

So the bee takes the nectar from the flower, but in doing so it takes the seeds inside the flower and spreads them all over the ground so that more flowers can grow.

Like the honeybee, we come to church so that nourished we might go from the church to seek the lost and cause faith's flower to blossom in them. Thus we shall be blest for the merciful shall obtain mercy.

**Kids' Chronicle**

ANSWER KEY

- Seth
- Ham
- Jacob & Esau
- Miriam
- Andrew
- James & John
- Lazarus

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