

Synod will discover God's will for us

By Father Joseph A. Hart
Guest contributor

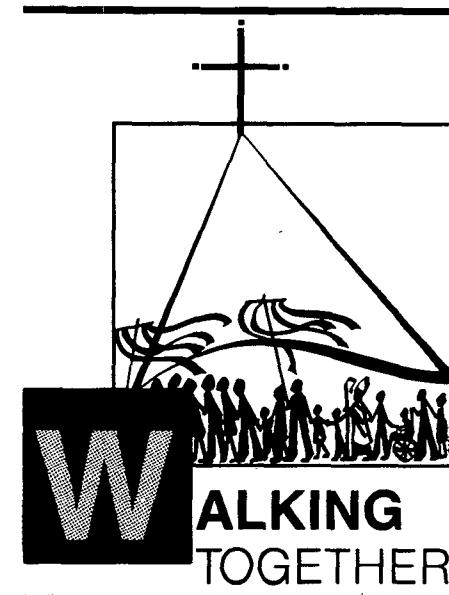
In different ways both the Democrats and Republicans have been vying since this summer's conventions to convince us which side has the best ideas, which is more liberal or conservative, which side is more trustworthy, which side will serve the people better.

When the dust settles next Tuesday night, the winners in both parties will be the candidates who won the most votes. That is how a democracy works.

A Synod, however, is not like that. As we prepare for our first regional synods in December, I'd like to point out some of the differences.

In lots of ways a Synod looks just like a political process: it holds meetings, it formulates recommendations, sets priorities and counts votes. As many diocesan Catholics have already discovered, however, several things make a Synod different.

First and foremost, a Synod listens for the voice of God's Holy Spirit. In a democratic process, we vote for what appeals to us or what will benefit us or our group the most. In a Synod, prayer and listening are just as important as voting.



Prayer makes us remember our reliance on God's grace for all that is good. Once we begin to trust in God's care for us, we find ourselves less tied to our own favorite solutions to the complex problems that face us and more open to the spirit's prompting.

Likewise, patient listening is also essential since one single voice might be the one most attuned to the spirit and, therefore, the prophetic voice that must be heard by all.

Ordinarily, after much reflection and discussion, the church relies on

the vast majority's wisdom and insights as the course that should be followed, as the path marked out by the spirit. This is how the great Ecumenical Councils of the Church's history have always operated.

But even then it is important not to dismiss the minority voice as insignificant. The minority might be saying something quite important, something from which we must profit even if it is not the course we feel God has led us to follow at this moment.

Secondly, a Synod has no political parties. In a democracy, parties form naturally around the various approaches to solving the problems we face. A Synod, however, should not foster the splintering of the local church into many factions, each opposed to the other's vision and pastoral plan. Rather the Synod is a time of unity in which the whole Body of Christ in a particular region puts aside political, ethnic and racial differences to plan for the future of the local church together.

In fact, because a Synod is meant to discern God's will, it should have no factions, no parties, no special-interest groups, no liberal or conservative wings. No one should be politicking in favor of one recommendation or against another. Rather there should

be a heartfelt and prayerful search for what will benefit the church's overall mission. We should have a genuine longing for what God wants of us as church today.

Finally, unlike the political process, a Synod cannot pander to the loudest voices. A Synod looks not at what will please the most people but what will serve the most people. This means that in the final discernment of our priorities we must choose what is the most loving for the greatest number and not necessarily what is popular or current or politically correct.

For these reasons, the Synod's work can never be defined by a series of majority votes because its aim is not to discover which plan or program or action is the most popular but what is God's will for us.

This is why Bishop Matthew H. Clark, in his pastoral letter at the very beginning of the synod process, reminded us that we must "radically depend on God's Spirit, working through the prayer and wisdom of the whole community and so leading us to communion with the greatest needs and most precious resources of the Body of Christ."

Father Hart is director of the diocesan Synod.

Sanctity is acceptable to all believers

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Matthew 5:1-12; (R2) Revelation 7:2-4, 9-17; (R2) 1 John 3:1-3.

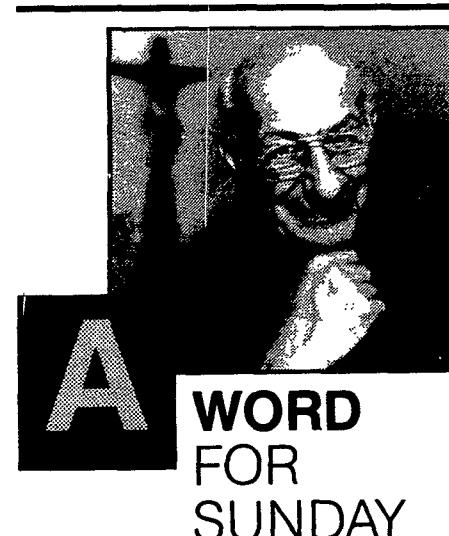
Sunday, the feast of All Saints, pre-empts the 31st Sunday of the Year.

Many scholars believe the feast of All Saints originated in Ireland, spread to England and Europe, and finally to Rome.

The idea of a feast for all saints goes back as early as A.D. 270, to a festival honoring all the church's martyrs.

The Pantheon, which is one of the best preserved ancient edifices in Rome, was built to all the pagan gods of the seven planets in 27 B.C. by the son-in-law of Augustus Caesar. Commemorating the victory of Actium over Antony and Cleopatra, the Pantheon was consecrated as a Christian church by Pope Boniface IV in A.D. 609 and dedicated to Our Lady as Queen of Martyrs. On this occasion, it is said, a large quantity of martyrs' bones were removed here from the catacombs. The feast was then celebrated on May 13.

The Pantheon, which has a magnificent dome, contains the tomb of the



great artist Raphael. Apparently when Michelangelo saw the dome, he noted that it was not fitting for a pagan temple to tower over all of Rome's Christian churches. So he produced the great dome of St. Peter's modelled after that of the Pantheon.

The Irish perhaps extended this feast of the martyrs to embrace all saints — virgins and confessors as well. Gregory IV (826-44) adopted this feast in reparation for iconoclasm.

Comprising two Greek words, iconoclasm means smashing icons or statue-breaking. The iconoclasts condemned the veneration of images and praying to the saints.

This heresy probably had its roots in Muslim and Jewish opposition to images. Perhaps to ingratiate himself to these powerful neighbors and because he was convinced images posed an obstacle to their conversion, Leo the Isaurian (717-741) decreed the destruction of all images and icons and the relics of the saints, as being condemned in the Old Testament.

Widespread persecution resulted before appeal was made to Rome. The Second Council of Nicea was called in 787. The council condemned iconoclasm and reaffirmed the church's tradition of praying to the saints and venerating images.

Pope John Paul II initiated the Marian year of 1987 in his encyclical *Mater Redemptoris*, which commemorated the council's 1,200th anniversary.

Two of iconoclasm's many effects were the creation of the papal states and the feast of All Saints.

When the Lombards invaded Italy in 756, the Holy Father turned to the west instead of the east because it was

tainted by iconoclasm. Pepin defeated the Lombards and created the papal states. The Holy Father, not the Eastern Emperor, became Italy's protector — hence "Il Papa," the pope.

To make reparation for the desecration of the saintly relics and the smashing of their images, Pope Gregory IV universalized the feast of All Saints and changed the date of its celebration from May 13 to Nov. 1.

Today the removal of statues from our churches and the ignoring of sacramentals makes one wonder if iconoclasm is not rearing its ugly head once again. No doubt that was why the Holy Father referred to the 1,200th anniversary of the Second Council of Nicea in his Marian encyclical in 1987.

The feast of All Saints is meant to teach us that sanctity is accessible to all. We all are called to be saints. We are named after them to imitate them.

On the eve of the feast — All Hallows' Eve or Halloween — children dressed up in the garb of the saint whose name they bore. The essence of sanctity is to have the attitudes expressed in the beatitudes. We must pray for these because we shall be happy when we have them. Happiness is the hallmark of sanctity.

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