

For a Shared Mission

Shortly before his death in 2004, I had a conversation with Bishop James Corboy SJ, one of the last surviving participants in the Second Vatican Council. He told me how the Council had changed him radically, particularly in his understanding of the Church and the role of the Holy Spirit. When the preliminary draft of the Decree on the Church was circulated at the Council, Bishop Corboy was pleased to note that it was largely in line with what he himself had been teaching, with prominence given to the institutional elements of the Church. But it was roundly rejected by the Council! A revised version emerged, giving priority to the Church as a community of believers, united by a shared baptism more fundamental than any subsequent hierarchical distinctions. 'I realised that everything was community', Bishop Corboy told me. 'It wasn't just the

Church as a community, it was the diocese as a community, the parish as a community ... I wouldn't just be going my own way.'

The second major area of conversion for Bishop Corboy concerned the role of the Holy Spirit. 'I don't remember the Holy Spirit having any influence in my early life', he admitted. Similarly, early in the Council, the Holy Spirit hardly got a mention. This was criticised by delegates from the Eastern Churches, where devotion to the Holy Spirit was a lived part of their faith. In response, a new awareness of the Holy Spirit was introduced into the Council, giving a special emphasis to the Church as the Temple of the Holy Spirit.

The synodality that Pope Francis proposes to the whole Church these days is nothing more than the concrete realisation of these two insights from the Council. Through our baptism, we are all of us fundamentally one community of believers. Through baptism and confirmation, each of us has received the gifts of the Holy Spirit. By sharing our deepest convictions in a humble and prayerful spirit, and by listening respectfully to the convictions of others, we hope, over time, to be led to a deeper appreciation of the path the Spirit marks out for us. We may be surprised!

Pope's Intention:

We pray that the Church continue to sustain in all ways a synodal lifestyle, as a sign of co-responsibility, promoting the participation, the communion and the mission shared among priests, religious and lay people.

*From Patrick Carberry SJ,
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