

As always it is a delight to be with you in our Archdiocesan Pastoral Council gathering. Here, together, in the presence of the Lord and enthused by the Holy Spirit we are able to discern the paths upon which the Lord is guiding us. As we quiet ourselves for a few moments and open our hearts in prayer and worship we are able to hear the voice of God as He speaks to us. Without this inner quiet, and without this listening, we cannot hear the voice of God's Spirit. Nor can we hear the cries of God's people if we are listening only to ourselves.

The biblical readings in these days tell us the story of the Maccabees, a family of Jewish people who felt the weight of oppression as the Greeks, under King Antiochus, the successor of Alexander the Great. The Greeks tried to replace the faith of the Jews in the one, true God. They sought to suppress the observance of the Jewish law, language, and customs. Many young Jewish people went over to the ways of the Greeks. Even the Temple in Jerusalem was defiled with a statue of pagan gods. The Maccabees refused to leave their faith behind. They stood up to the Greeks, even to the point of death! They heard the cry of God's people and responded by leading them back to the faith. They cleansed the Temple and restored true worship there. (This is where the Hanukkah comes from, about the sanctuary light burning for 8 days without oil.)

The Maccabees listened to the voice of God, and then responded to the needs of God's people. This is our task today. We, too, must listen, and listen deeply, so that we may then know what to

do for God’s people. This act of listening together, and then moving forward together is an ancient practice of the Church, called Synodality. It is a Greek word that means “listening, together.” This is the direction that our Holy Father, Pope Francis has been asking to move in. To be a church that “listens together,” and then prompts us to act together, as the Holy Spirit guides us.

Synodality is not easy work. It requires great discipline, patience, wisdom, trust, and self-control. It means that the answers we seek don’t appear like flashes of lightening, but more like the still, small voice heard by the Prophet Elijah when he was at the cave on Mt. Carmel.

As an Archdiocesan Pastoral Council we are called to be together in this Synodal way. We trust that the Holy Spirit is guiding us, strengthening us, and will never abandon us. So, we can listen without panic, and act without undue haste.

We face many issues as did the Jews in the time of the Maccabees. We find that many have left the faith. There is lots of bad news around us. As a faith community we feel oppressed. Many young people are no longer walking with us. Yet, the Holy Spirit is still with us! Now is our time to listen first, and then to act as the Spirit prompts us.