

## Reflection for the 17<sup>th</sup> October 2021

The question I am asked quite regularly is about numbers at Mass following the lockdowns. From the ‘Mass Count’ over the previous three weekends it seems that we are about 150 people fewer than the 2019 statistics show. In broad terms only about 50% of our 2019 congregation currently attends Mass in person, rather than via the live stream or not at all. I understand that this is a crude measure and that there are a number of factors at play and it may well be that we need to see how the winter season plays out before a more accurate picture emerges. I mention this, not out of a sense of anxiety but in the context of the Church’s celebration, mission and activity over the next few months. As we can see the Church is not alone in facing difficulties, in fact, I think it is almost impossible to switch on the news without hearing the word ‘crisis’ many times over. To be fair there are some serious pressure points in health and social care, energy supplies and what is called the ‘supply chain’ for some goods and services. Not forgetting a much more serious issue concerning the climate. The word ‘crisis’ in biblical terms means an opportunity to make some judgements, for or against something or someone, in that context the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

This afternoon we have the Diocesan celebration for St. Philip Howard. He made decisions that were life changing and his life and work reaches down to us today as well as his intercession as one of the Saints. St. Philip lived at a time of religious and political turmoil and this eventually required of him a decision about returning to the Catholic faith of his baptism or to follow a different path. The grace of God was at work in St. Philip’s heart as he listened to St. Edmund Campion and after reflecting he became convinced of the truth of the Catholic faith. He decided to help further its cause despite his position at the court of Queen Elizabeth I and the risks that this path of faith entailed. Pope Francis suggests, in his Encyclical Letters, that the faith decisions that lay before us in our time of turmoil involve care for the environment together with fraternity and social friendship. These may well be life changing, although in a different sense than the path St. Philip took, who gave his life to bring the faith to life in his times.

So, this afternoon we also inaugurate the ‘Synod Path’ through which the whole Diocese can contribute to the Synod of Bishops in Rome in 2023 – also a significant year for us here in Arundel as the Cathedral was completed and consecrated in 1873. The preparatory document for the Synod sets the scene in the first paragraph: *‘...Pope Francis invites the entire Church to reflect on a theme that is decisive for its life and mission: ‘It is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the Church of the third millennium.’ This journey, which follows in the wake of the Church’s ‘renewal’ proposed by the Second Vatican Council, is both a gift and a task: by journeying together and reflecting together on the journey that has been made, the Church will be able to learn through her experience which processes can help her live **communion**, to achieve **participation**, to open Herself to **mission**. Our ‘journeying together’ is, in fact, what most effectively enacts and manifests the nature of the Church as the pilgrim and missionary people of God.’*

In today’s Gospel James and John ask for key places in glory. Jesus reminds them that *‘...anyone who wants to be first among you must be slave to all. For the Son of Man did not come not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.’* We too can serve by giving life to the synod path and protecting the life of the vulnerable and the environment.

God bless you, Canon David