

Synod Synthesis Mass
St George's Cathedral, Southwark
I June 2022 - St Justin Martyr

Dear Friends

St Justin Martyr was born in Samaria, the central part of ancient Israel, about one hundred years after the birth of Christ. His journey of conversion, like all our journeys - and like the pilgrimage of the Church - was subject to the transformative grace of Christ. Christian discipleship is never a purely human progression. We travel with our feet on the earth, but with our eyes and hearts seeking the Father, raised to new life in Christ, and yearning for renewal in the Holy Spirit.

St Justin pursued a philosophical search for truth. It led him to become a Stoic, then a Peripatetic, then a Pythagorean, and then a Platonist; and finally, he became a Christian. Few converts can match such a dynamic pedigree. But we each have a personal story of how we came to belong to Christ and to his Church. Each of us has made a journey, and, together, we are all called to journey forward in faith. This is what we mean by synodality. As you know, it comes from the Greek *συν* (meaning 'together') and *ὁδός* (meaning the 'way'). Our way is Christ; and together we journey to him and with him, inviting others to participate, accompanying them, and each other, with a joyful faith that gives hope.

St Justin was a martyr; but he wasn't beheaded for philosophy. Like, St Paul, he died for Christ and for his Gospel. For them both, there could be, in St Paul's words, no *'travesty of the truth,'* but only a powerful recourse to God and to the word of his grace. This divine word has the power to build up, to create communion. It offers us, here and now, and fully in eternity, a share in the inheritance of the saints. (cf. Acts 28:32)

We hear this word of grace from the Lord Jesus himself in his high priestly prayer to the Father: *'Keep those you have given me true to your name...*

[and]...consecrate them in the truth.' (cf. Jn 17: 11b; 17) We bear Christ's name. He is our truth. Each of us is sent out by him.

So, what might it mean for us to step out afresh together as the Body of Christ, in our parishes and dioceses, with an authentic shared responsibility for mission, service, and evangelisation? This is an important question for our continuing discernment, not least as we gather and sift our experiences of listening to each other.

Two weeks ago I travelled to the Holy Land. As I went through airport security, I placed everything that might set off any alarms into my hand luggage and sent it through the x-ray machine. My bag was held and eventually two attendants called me over. 'Sir,' they asked 'is there some kind of weapon in your hand luggage?' 'No,' I said, a little surprised. 'Something has shown up on the screen,' they said, 'may we investigate?' 'Of course,' I replied, and they cautiously explored my bag. We were all relieved when the 'weapon' turned out to be my pectoral cross.

St Justin was martyred because he witnessed to the truth of the cross, something illogical to those not on the way to salvation. But for Justin, and for us, the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus is God's wisdom. It is God's power to save. In Christ's dying and rising, God our Father proclaims his loving mercy for the world. As we discern what it means to continue our missionary journey together, we draw all we are, and all we have, from the saving truth of our new life in Christ. We need to speak loudly, to shout from the housetops, in words and in actions, that God is love and that God is mercy; especially to people who doubt they are worthy to be loved or worthy to be forgiven.

In his famous *First Apology*, St Justin described the celebration of the Eucharist in the Early Church. There's one line in particular that can encourage us in journeying together for the sake of mission, in the service of communion and participation. Justin writes: '*...when our prayer is ended, bread is brought forward*

along with the wine and water, and the president likewise gives thanks to the best of his ability... That sentiment, those words – ‘*to the best of one’s ability*’ – are an encouragement to us all.

Simply and sincerely we want to do our best for the Lord and for each other. We listen, first and foremost to the Lord, to the best of our ability. We listen respectfully and generously to each other, to the best of our ability. We discern how to fulfil the missionary mandate given us by the Lord Jesus, to the best of our ability. We look to serve others, in particular the weakest and the poorest, and those on the fringes of our Church and society, to the best of our ability. We really do want to do the best we can. And we really do want to see the best in each other, in our Church, and in our world.

The Lord Jesus prayed to his Father: ‘*As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world, and for their sake I consecrate myself so that they too may be consecrated in truth.*’ When we give our very best to the Lord, the word and work of his grace carries us forward. His loving kindness elevates us beyond our limited human abilities. It lifts us nearer towards the blessed peace, love, and joy of God’s kingdom. In our Church and for our waiting world, it shapes us to be bearers of the beatitudes.

+ John Wilson
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