

JANUARY 16, 2026 FATHER MICHAEL COUTTS

Our first reading, from the book of Samuel, tells us a story of a transition from Levitical priesthood to a monarchy.

The people of Israel, when they came into the promised land, were led by the priest, who not only offered sacrifices, or offered prayers for them, but he was also responsible for law and order. Now this is not a big kingdom, it was a small community. So the priest's word was the word of God, and order was kept.

But the Israelites grew envious of their neighbours. They saw the pomp and the ceremony, the horses and the chariots, the celebration and the dancing, and they got envious. "We want to be like them." And so they went to Samuel, and said, "We want to be like them. You don't need to be taking care of us, and your sons have not been true to themselves."

And Samuel was very upset. He said, "Look, from the time of the exodus, God has been your God, and you have been God's people." And they said, "We don't care." And then Samuel told them the side effects. "Look," he says, "you want a king? The king will take the choices of your young men. He will make them work in the army, they will die for the sake of his honour. He will take them, and make them work in his fields. They will plough, and he will reap all the benefits. They will take your young men, and make them work in his vineyards, and he will benefit from them. As for your women, he'll take the choicest of the women, and keep them in his palace, to be servants, to be maids, and even to be concubines in his palace."

And they said, "We don't care. We want a monarchy." And so, finally, Samuel gave in, and he says, "Lord, I don't know what to do. But these are the people who prefer, instead of being in your care, and your

concern. They prefer to put their whole lives in the hands of a man who is covered with power." Who has got no desire to take care of them, but only himself. Things haven't changed, even until today. They had kings in those days who were liars, adulterers, and who did not give a penny for anything of them. But finally, Samuel gave in to them.

As we come to the Gospel, we have that delightful narrative.

The narrative of four men, four friends, bringing their paralysed friend to the Lord. It is the first example of what we call synodality. Now many of you don't like that word, "synodality." But it comes from the Greek "syn" and "hodos," which means to go on the road with. It means companions on a journey. And so they were companions with this man. It was a way of life that was started by Pope Francis, and continues with our present pope, Leo. It simply means, I walk in a journey in our faith towards the day when the Lord will call us.

And so they bring this man to Jesus, and this is the first act of synodality. Paralysis is a very disagreeable ailment. You have to depend on everybody for your food, for your clothing, for your choice of food, and even intimate things like toilets, and baths, and cleaning your face after eating. But they love this man so much that they brought him into the presence of Jesus. And Jesus himself was in synodality with them. He would walk with faith with them in their journey. He didn't ask them, "Do you want to be healed," like he asked Bartimaeus, nor did he ask them, "Do you have faith," he simply acted. "Your sins are forgiven." He walked with them in faith.

And when he said, "Your sins are forgiven," at once the people got upset. Now everybody, when there is healing, is rejoicing, and is happy. But here they were wondering why, exactly, did Jesus actually go beyond

what they expected? And Jesus said, as we heard in that story, It's easier to say, "Your sins are forgiven" than to heal. And so he heals them.

And that is why synodality, and walking with people in their faith, is something that is a challenge to us. First we have to step out of our comfort zone, and to accept that there are the people within our faith community that think in a different way from us. The second challenge, and the challenge is to go out beyond that Church community. Our world is divided according to politics more than religion in these days in our time. When we tend to classify, and put people into right wing and left wing. We even classify people according to their religion. Muslim, Hindus, atheists, and we Christians, against all of them.

Our synodality simply means we are journeying towards God. In a way that we are all made in the image and likeness of God. And therefore, when we walk with them, it is—the beauty is that we don't walk alone. Christ walks along with us. Christ steps with each one of us, in our faith journey. And if we cannot trust in the Lord, who can we trust in? We walk with the hand—in putting our hand in the hand of the Man from Galilee.

God bless you all.