**Reflection for Sunday 22 October 2023**

 **29th Sunday Ordinary Time**

Isaiah 45:1,4-6. 1 Thess 1:1-5. Matt. 22:15-21

As we head into the fourth week of the Universal Synod in Rome, the readings today remind us to affirm the faith we have been given, and to remember that it is from this faith, that we receive the love and hope that we need to be Christians in the world today. It’s a world that is often very challenging to us and even sometimes proves unwelcoming to any person of faith.

A life-giving community of faith is described very beautifully by Paul in his first letter to the Thessalonians. Paul expresses his satisfaction that faith, hope and love are at work in this community. He places its members among those called and chosen by God. He affirms them in their faith as he notes that the Gospel has not been received by them as mere words, but has made a strong and real impact on their lives through the power of the Holy Spirit and through their own firm conviction. As a result, their faith is alive, demonstrated through loving actions. They are an inspiration to Christians elsewhere because of their perseverance and hope in the Lord Jesus Christ.

We are also reminded in the first reading from the prophet Isaiah that God has called each one of us by name. God calls each one of us, because God loves each one of us equally, and each one of us is called to play a unique part in God’s plan for humanity and all his creation. The Thessalonian community reflects the experience of Catholic communities around the world today, who are living out their faith in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, with love and hope.

The questions that are being addressed in the Synod are an expression of the richness of the process from which they were drawn. That process, which we were all invited to be part of, gathered the rich and varied experiences of each of faith communities around the world. And the Document synthesising the insights from around the world tells us that “the questions bear the imprint of the particular names and faces of those who took part, and they bear witness to the faith experience of the People of God and thus reveal the reality of a transcendent experience.’’ From this point of view, they indicate a horizon towards which we are invited to travel with confidence, deepening the synodal practice of the Church

The synodal journey that we are all on has shown individuals, parishes and dioceses that their experience is needed in the Church. We all have a part to play in finding the best way forward in carrying out God’s plan for the Church in the world today. Yes, there are challenges; yes, we know there are even conflicting views within the Church itself, but the power of the Spirit is there, just as it was for the people of Thessalonica in the early Church. The Synod invites us to travel towards that horizon of the future with confidence by deepening the synodal practice of the Church. In this we are led by the power of the Spirit and by the firm conviction of the People of God.

Pope Francis often encourages us not to be afraid of the Holy Spirit. In fact, he tells us that with the Holy Spirit, faith is life, the love of the Lord conquers us, and hope is reborn. We pray for these gifts of faith, hope and love for our Church as we continue the synodal journey next week.