Many of us here today have fallen in love at some stage in our lives. How did it happen? You cannot fall in love with someone you haven’t met, or someone you don’t know. So, in each case there was a period of “getting to know you”, of spending time together, of experiencing the other.

This is just how St Paul introduced Jesus to the Thessalonians. He spent time with them so that they could observe him. He accompanied them and invited them to try imitating how he lived his life, and, through him, to become imitators of Jesus and how Jesus lived. In this way their faith in God grew to the extent they became famous for it throughout the rest of Greece. We could say St Paul walked together with them on a synodal pathway of discovery.

The Working Document for the Synod in Rome constantly refers to how our faith must be grounded in practical experiences where walking together means not leaving anyone behind, and remaining alongside those who struggle the most. This too is the clear message of our first reading from Exodus where we are called to welcome the stranger, the widow and the orphan and be just in all our dealings. These are all very practical examples of ‘’Love your neighbour as yourself”.

These practical concerns are central to the Synod. A synodal Church walks together not leaving anyone behind, and is alongside those who struggle the most. We can ask ourselves in our parishes how are we building a synodal Church capable of promoting the belonging and participation of the least within the Church and in society? How are we reaching out to those who are different from us, to those who are struggling? How are we providing pastoral outreach and care to migrant communities? How are we connecting with the men and women of our time?

The Holy Spirit is moving in all that has happened so far on the synodal pathway and all that is happening now in Rome. We are growing in our awareness that a synodal Church is a listening Church. For many, the great surprise was the experience of being listened to by the community. For some this was a new experience, of receiving recognition of our unique human worth as sons and daughters of God who is love. As we listened attentively to each other’s lived experiences, we grew in mutual respect and began to discern the movements of God’s Spirit in the lives of others and in our own.

By listening carefully, and prayerfully, to one another, and by walking, supportively, together on the synodal pathway, each one of us can draw closer to each other and closer to God. In our listening, each one of us can learn a little bit more about how to love God and how to love our neighbour. This is why listening is so important in this process, it helps us to put words on what God is asking of us and begin to name practical steps we can take to make a difference to people’s lives especially to those in most need.