

## **A CHURCH THAT LISTENS**

### **Introduction**

Ancient Wisdom says that a man was given a pair of ears but only one mouth, to listen double the amount he speaks. In the Gospels, when Jesus was asked which was the greatest commandment, he replied quoting scripture “Hear, O Israel...” (Mk 12, 29) and when teaching, he often ended with the phrase “Let anyone with ears listen!” (Mt 11, 15; 13, 9).

So, the first attitude that the disciple ought to have is that of listening. Christ shows us this himself in his encounter with the disciples of Emmaus. Although he knew well what the two disciples were going through, Christ still asked them what happened and he listened to them attentively. It was Christ’s willingness to listen that led to the disciples being open to listening to what he had to say.

This shows us how fundamental a listening attitude is to building a strong foundation for a Church that welcomes and accompanies Her brothers and sisters in their life journey, before sending them out to continue the mission Jesus himself started. In a world full of different voices, what kind of listening should the disciple practice? What kind of listening should the Church practice?

### **1. The Listening of the Word**

Scripture clearly shows that Jesus wants us to have a listening attitude. He considers as his mother and brothers those who listen to God’s word and do as he says.

Before being sent out, the missionary disciple needs to learn how to listen to God’s Word. In the Letter to the Hebrews, we find that “the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow; it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” (Heb 4, 12). The message of the Gospel is still alive and powerful, and we should not be afraid to let the Word enter into the depths of our hearts.

The practice of Lectio Divina has a long history in the Tradition of the Church. This practice requires that one not only understands the text critically but is also capable of meditating upon it, that is, to ponder that which is written and let the power of the Word sink into the depths of one’s heart, where one’s decisions are taken and one’s will is formed .

Transformation in Christ is the fruit of how much one listens with one’s own heart, that which is found in the Gospel: when in moments of disappointment, in wounds caused by sin and a hardened heart, one hears the words of the Risen Christ, “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Mt 28, 20).

Through the practice of Lectio Divina, one also comes to realise that silence is an important aspect of listening. Among the inner thoughts and voices, one comes to notice an interior peace, a silence that in itself quietens the heart, and it is through this silence that one can learn what is pleasing to God. The meditation of the Word leads to contemplation, which is resting in God's silence. Then, silence will no longer cause fear but it becomes part of our lives. It is the realisation that like the Teacher, the disciple is nourished through the listening of the Word and silence.

## **2. Listening to the Other**

Listening is the beginning of love. This is what the Risen Christ showed us on his journey with the disciples of Emmaus. The act of listening to the others has a strong dynamic that can lead to healing, and it can also be the start of a reconciliation process. When one is ready to listen to the other, to be attentive, it can be a sign of unconditional love.

There are two important elements when listening to another person:

First, a new space is created where one is allowed to voice that which he is going through. The listener witnesses the experience of the person speaking. It is through this sharing of experiences that one can come to receive the gift of the other, to trust, and to the spirit of community: the realisation of not being alone.

Secondly, in this same space, the listener has the opportunity to listen without passing judgement and without thinking of the answer he ought to give. The dynamic of active and attentive listening opens the listener to the gift of the other, as well as the knowledge of the presence of God in the other person's life. This type of listening also allows the listener to understand the person speaking (and also coming to understand himself more). He is being invited to broaden his worldview by making space for narratives and opinions which he doesn't necessarily agree with, but which exist and which are part of the wider reality.

This type of attentive listening from the heart can bring healing not only to individuals, but also to our communities. This can also be done in families when there are disagreements. The aim of listening is for one to be open to the other, to understand the other more and not to force one's understanding on another.

## **3. Listening To The Reality Around Us**

This listening attitude needs to be formed, as it does not come naturally. Nowadays, everyone wants to have their say, which is considered more important than listening to others. However, a disciple of Jesus needs to learn how to listen attentively in order to understand. Through listening, the disciple also learns how to listen to the wider reality around him, to recognise and sift through the signs of the times, to be open to listening to those around him, as well as those who live on the peripheries. He learns to listen to the cry of the weak and those pushed to the side, as well as to the silence of those who do not have a voice. He learns how to listen to the questions thrown at him, sometimes in a rage... without being afraid of not having an

immediate answer. A listening attitude in itself already gives value to the questions being asked.

### **Conclusion**

We are all called as missionary disciples to stop and listen... I need to stop and listen to the Word of God, to listen to those around me, to listen and recognise what is happening in society and in our communities.

We invite you to accept this invitation to stop, listen, and sift through that which God is placing before you today.