

The service of listening

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INFO SSCC Brothers No 160 – 1 December 2021



Saint Benedict - Listen!
(terracota by Brother Antoine
Gélineau, Nuestra Señora de
Tamié)

Dear Brothers,

We are beginning the season of Advent. The liturgy of the Church and prayer prepares our hearts and our senses to welcome the Lord who continues to come to meet us. The Lord Jesus enters our hearts through our hearing, through the quality of our listening. We are to listen to the Lord who comes to us through his Word, in the murmur of the events of our world, in the voice of our brothers and sisters in the community and in the cry of the poor and of the earth.

The passage relating Mary's visit to her relative Elizabeth can help us at this time. Everything takes place in the home front, with no other witnesses than us, the readers. The essential is played out in the encounter between these two women: Mary's visit and greeting reveal the good news that had been hidden until then; Elizabeth, for her part, rejoices over the child leaping in her womb, which until recently had been barren; Mary receives confirmation that the child she is carrying is the Lord. This whole encounter is marked by the discreet action of the Holy Spirit. Thus both become mediators of shared good news. God is the poet of mediations, through which he is encountered: a meeting, a visit, listening and welcoming,

through of all these mediations God is able to work in each of these women. Believing in God, in his "ruminated" and "understood" Word is a source of happiness for Elizabeth, for the child of her womb and for Mary: "Blessed is she who believed that the things spoken to her by the Lord would be fulfilled" (Lk 1:45).

Inclining the ear

Saint Benedict, in his Rule, presents "careful listening" as the gateway to the "school of the Lord's service": "LISTEN carefully, my child, to your master's precepts, and incline the ear of your heart". (Prologue 1) which is concretised in the constant exercise of obedience to the Lord through the brothers. As a connoisseur of the human heart, Benedict knew that listening with the heart presupposed a work of personal purification and asceticism, in order to effectively dispose the heart itself to listen to the Lord through the mediations of his Word, the abbot, the brothers - in times of peace and difficulty - and the guests. To dispose oneself in this way to listen to the Lord is to return again and again to the "work of obedience". We learn again and again to obey the Lord, listening above all to our brothers and sisters.

The whole Church has entered into a time of extensive listening through the synodal process. This process has as its starting point, the knowledge that we walk together with so many men and women, believers and non-believers, all loved by God. Vital to this process is listening to one another in such a way that the listening changes us, disposes us to the God who never tires of coming to meet us through the voice of his Spirit. Basically, it is a matter of listening to the Holy Spirit, who like the wind "blows where it wills; you can hear the sound it makes, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes" (Jn 3:8), remaining open to the surprises that the Spirit will certainly prepare for us along the way." (Preparatory Document for the Synod).

Let us then prepare ourselves for the Lord who comes through the service of listening to his Word, to our brothers and sisters, and to the subtle voice of the Spirit in the murmur of daily events.

Faternally,

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