

THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING

Martha had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word. (Luke 10, 39)

Even more than by speech, the spirit of communication is represented by empathetic listening. I realize more and more in my pastoral work just how important listening is. Only if we learn to listen can our words prove credible. If we are not able to listen to our own words - however persuasive the form and meaning of their content - it is highly unlikely that they will succeed in creating a bridge between ourselves and others.

Our capacity to listen allows us not only to grasp the thinking and the requirements of others, but also to open our minds to new ideas and new horizons. In this regard, Zeno, a philosopher in antiquity, made the following ironic statement which, however, was not without good reason: "We have two ears and only one mouth, precisely in order that we should listen more and talk less."

In the Martha and Mary affair Jesus wants to make us see that it is only through listening that our words and actions take on value and become instruments of genuine and profitable communication. Both Martha and Mary are open, sociable persons. But Jesus establishes the priority clearly: whoever wishes to be truly open, or wants to offer something must first learn to listen to His words, as Mary has done. In this way Jesus does not deny the value of hospitality. Indeed He willingly accepts it. He appreciates the efforts that Martha is making to serve Him and His disciples in the best way possible. Yet He believes that stopping and

listening to what He has to say is the best attitude that can be offered.

I believe that the strength of Christianity is revealed in one's openness to listening to the words of the Gospel, and then to attempt to translate them into living experience! Faith itself springs from listening to the Word of God (Romans 10, 17). Listening is important not only in our relationship with God, but also in our relationship with our neighbor.

It is important to be able to listen to young people who feel they are not understood. Only if we learn to listen to them can we become credible points of reference for them. I think that a lot of juvenile violence, which is so worrying for us, would diminish appreciably if we only learnt to listen to what young people have to say to us. Only listening allows us to approach men and women who are confused and are trying to give a meaning to their lives. Only listening allows us to understand the needs of the elderly who feel isolated by a society which, in the name of competitiveness, is less and less united with the weakest.

Just as a good doctor makes his diagnosis and prescribes the cure only after having first listened attentively to his patient, so we too must first learn to listen so that we can offer words of comfort and support.

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