

A Reflection put together by Richard Rohr as the worldwide Church continues with the Synodal Process

Holy Listening.....A Listening Heart

"Listen carefully, my daughter, my son, to my instructions and attend to them with the ear of your heart. This is advice from one who loves you; welcome it and faithfully put it into practice." —Prologue, *The Rule of St. Benedict*

Retreat leader and journalist Judith Valente writes of the importance of listening in Benedictine spirituality:

I've often marvelled that the first word of *The Rule of St. Benedict* isn't pray, worship, or even love. It's *listen*. This small, unobtrusive word speaks in a whisper. To anyone who studies Benedictine spirituality, the phrase *listen . . . with the ear of the heart* becomes so familiar we can easily lose sight of how revolutionary it is. Listening in the Benedictine sense is not a passive mission. Benedict [c. 480–547] tells us we must *attend* to listening. In some translations of *The Rule*, we are to actively *incline* ourselves toward it, and nurture it in our everyday activities. Listening is an act of will. . . .

Listening cracks open the door to another Benedictine concept from which most of us would rather run - that of obedience. . . . Obedience comes from the Latin, *oboedire*, to give ear, to harken, to listen. The Benedictine writer Esther de Waal says that obedience moves us from our "contemporary obsession with the self," and inclines us toward others. . . . St. Benedict moves beyond the common understanding of the word as solely an authoritarian, top-down dynamic. He stresses instead *mutual obedience*, a horizontal relationship where careful listening and consideration is due to each member of the community from each member, as brothers and sisters. *It is by this way of obedience*, he says, *that we go to God*.

Author Esther de Waal describes how in Benedictine spirituality there is an inherent connection between listening and responsive action:

To listen closely, with every fibre of our being, at every moment of the day, is one of the most difficult things in the world, and yet it is essential if we mean to find the God whom we are seeking. If we stop listening to what we find hard to take then, as the Abbot of St. Benoît-sur-Loire puts it in a striking phrase, '*We're likely to pass God by without even noticing Him.*' And now it is our obedience which proves that we have been paying close attention. . . .

So, to obey [in the Benedictine tradition] really means to hear and then act upon what we have heard, or, in other words, to see that the listening achieves its aim. We are not being truly attentive unless we are prepared to act on what we hear. If we hear and do nothing more about it, then the sounds have simply fallen on our ears, and it is not apparent that we have actually heard them at all.