

LISTEN WITH THE EAR OF YOUR HEART!

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Introduction

To be in tune with the title, at the beginning I will quote Esther de Waal, who writes about this first verse of the Prolog. "I could never have imagined that a practical handbook and guide for community living would have this most loving, warm, accepting opening, which addresses each one of us personally. It at once promises that the individual is not going to get lost in the crowd, nor get tied up in juridical structures. 'Listen' is an arresting word meant to catch my attention. It is admonition, exhortation, to arouse or awaken, to pierce the heart, to challenge. 'Listen!' I could take that as a summary of the whole of Benedict's teaching. ... plunges me at once into a personal relationship. It takes me away from the danger of talking about God and not communing *with* him. Here is a person seeking another person in a dialogue." And Esther de Waal wants to answer with all her being: "Here I am" (Prol 18), but she also knows that this is the grace of the God who has addressed us personally.¹

- Could we see in the whole Rule of Benedict that it is about a personal relationship of someone interested in us, accepting and loving us, and that the organizational structures are a consequence of this?

Humanly speaking, it seems to me that all of us have the desire to be listened to with the heart. At the beginning we may ask ourselves: "Do we have some experiences, where we had the feeling: the one we were communicating with, was totally intent on us, and listened in depth?" From my own experience I would like to enumerate three persons who stand for this attitude: Karl Rahner, who also reinforced the listening by putting one hand behind his ear; Dom Helder Camara, who in five minutes had grasped what I had to ask, and I felt totally understood; and finally also a retreat-master whose interviews lasted generally less than 10 minutes: but he had the capacity to listen so attentively that the retreatants felt everything important had been said. Maybe here or during the next short pause it would be a good idea to write the names of some of those listening persons we met. Was it always a long dialogue? Most of us have to listen often, especially to the Sisters, but also to other persons. Experiences of this kind can make us aware that listening with the ear of our heart is not a matter of time, but of attitude and may be of intensity.

This title "listen with the ear of your heart" was given to me. It is a contraction of the two first lines of Prologue 1 in the Rule of Benedict. I will look at first at these two lines and see what is important to them, comparing different translations.

Secondly I will go through the whole Prologue (compared with Benedict's immediate source).

Thirdly I will very shortly mention the semantic fields of eye and ear in the general context of yesterday and today (philosophy and theology).

The fourth paragraph is built on the word "audire", "auditus", "auris" (to listen, to hear and ear) in the Rule of Benedict (again against his immediate source).

Then I will leave this circumscribed field and go deeper into the situations where that listening and its answer are depicted in the Rule of Benedict (par. 5) and also see at the end (par. 6) what could have been heard and said with a non-listening heart, hoping that this last point would help us to formulate questions or opinions. Very often from the opposite sight, the positive intention becomes more evident.

In this sense the conferences will end open-ended.

1. Taking a close look at Prol 1a

¹ De Waal, Esther: *A Life-Giving Way: A Commentary on the Rule of St. Benedict*, Collegeville 1998

I will read the Latin text and then some different translations: "Obsculta, o fili, praecepta magistri, et inclina aurem cordis tui ». The "RB 1980" has: "Listen carefully, my son, to the master's instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart." The more literal translation of Doyle runs: "Listen, my son, to your master's precepts, and incline the ear of your heart". Holzherr in his edition is a bit free: "Hear and heed, my son, the master's teaching and bow the ear of your heart." Another one (De Dreuille) has: "Listen, my son, to the precepts of the master and incline the ear of your heart willingly"; and Kardong: "Listen, o my son, to the teachings of your master, and turn to them with the ear of your heart". In an inclusive language Wybourne says: "Listen carefully, my child, to the teaching of the master and bend close the ear of your heart."

All tried to express well the Latin word "obscura, ausculta" into English; mostly it is translated with "to listen", as it is in harmony with our title, but also "hear and heed", or "harken" (McCann), and Wybourne with "RB 80" add: "carefully". Looking over the translation we can feel the endeavour to express a very intense listening and its importance. - The next nuances are with "inclina aurem tuam" (Latin). "Attend to them" ("RB 1980") does not seem as strong, as to "incline the ear of your heart" (Doyle). Someone says: "bow" the ear (which might sound strange), and one adds "willingly", taken from the next line (this is of course presupposed), or "turn to them", which seems to me a weak translation. Another one says: "bend close" which makes the meaning clear. Inclining is in any case about bowing in one direction, one cannot do this in two or three directions at the same time; it implies an effort, underlining an important direction, and at the same time an effort to come close. It has also the assonance of humility, you do not listen from above, so you go down. The one talking to you is over, above you. And love plays also its part. The fact is that the inclination of our ear is not a natural situation. Putting "willingly" at the end of this expression indicates that it is not an imposed attitude but voluntary, we could say: with all our will or with love. The only one who translates exactly the Latin "O fili mi", is Kardong with "o my son" thus expressing also the emotional tone of the verse which is given in the original text. But strictly speaking, here we are already outside our exact theme, which does not mention explicitly the person hearing and speaking and also not what we hear. So our theme is broader.

Some might wonder why it is not the ears (Plural) of our heart. The original text and the translations speak only of one ear, and not of the head, but of the heart. Maybe we are so used to it, that we no longer perceive that it is a quite unusual picture. Generally we speak about the ears in the plural. We have one mouth and two ears. I learned something during a seminar I gave in Korea, where we could not communicate so much through our words but through pictures. And to the question what listening means, one group had drafted a monk with one big hear. At that time, this was new to me. So I asked why they had given him only one ear. They explained that this was part of their tradition. So often the sounds and words enter into one ear and leave us through the other ear. But if there is only one ear, the incoming word does not have this possibility and must go to the depth of the heart (or also dye). It falls into the midst of the person, its centre! The heart is the vis-à-vis of the word. An existential decision is made. – All translations are agreeing to talk not about the ears but about the ear in the singular.

Our title "Listen with the ear of your heart" contracts the first two lines, and it drops to what we should listen to, maybe purposely letting it stay uncertain and at the same time, making the listening broader and underlining mainly the attitude of listening. The Prologue says that what comes to us as voice, are the precepts of the Master, the admonitions of a kind Father, or Christ's words. One thinks at first maybe of Benedict's words, but he only wants to reflect the words of Christ, who is also Father. The title of this conference leaves out also the description of the one who has to listen. So we can address it to all of us.

We remember the time, when at table reading we took the indicated passages of the Rule for each day (it presupposed the reading of the whole Rule three times a year). At the beginning of the New Year we were confronted with this "Listen!" which made it clearer that we should take it as a norm and guideline for the whole year.

As it has been shown so often, the word "obscultare" has its root in the Wisdom literature of the Bible. This makes it clear that listening implies also the carrying out (obedience), practically it entails a whole lifestyle! In Prol 1 according to Benedict it is not a vague listening to something, but to a word of a loving Father or to precepts, leading us the way to our goal. The human person is called by God, named by Him. God's action always precedes ours. On our side the first thing to do is to be receptive. And the word "incline" rightly adds to it the humility before our great God and loving Lord. We do not just stand or sit, immobile, where we are, but we incline with expectation the ear of the heart to the direction from where the word comes. And surely we walk also our steps into this direction.

Here we can refer again to Esther de Waal: a word from a loving, warm and accepting person is addressed to me personally, and it implies a personal dialogue and relationship.

The whole Rule ends with the word "pervenias", "you will arrive". This confirms Esther de Waal's intuition: Listen – and you will arrive at the goal. All what our heart desires! And in between we go the way to this goal with an emphasis on listening to our guide.

2 – Importance of listening, hearing in the Prologue (It would be good to take the text).

As a second approach, I want to deepen the word "to listen, to hear" and its weight in the Prologue. Especially this introduction to the whole Rule, the Prologue, emphasizes very strongly the listening. As a whole it is an oral exhortation or invitation to listen to the divine voice. This is the voice of the Lord Christ. Already in the beginning three conditions are clarified: we have to be willing to carry out what we heard, we have to forego our self-wills (literally translated), and finally the listening with the ear of our heart can only happen if with most earnest prayer we beg that the Lord himself does it. - The following verses underline one attitude: we have to obey (parere) with the good gifts he puts into us. In this sense, the listening with the ear of the heart is one of his very precious gifts. It is not our merit. It would entail: the Lord addresses an imperative to us: "listen, incline the ear of your heart", and saying this he has already prepared in us the capacity to do it. The listening and doing is a decisive attitude in the monastic life.

One paragraph (Prol 8-13) is very intensive in regards to the vocabulary of hearing and listening. We are so to say sleeping, and the voice wakes us up (Prol 8f). The daily divine voice cries out loudly like thunder. "Today when you hear his voice, harden not your hearts." V. 11 goes on: "and again who has ears to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches" (V. 12). "Come, my children, listen to me" (V. 13). The whole paragraph wants to motivate the person to listen very carefully, not only now, but every day. It is important, that Benedict himself adds something and puts into the middle of this little section that the divine voice shouts daily: "Today when you hear his voice, harden not your hearts". In his immediate source, the daily divine voice cried out, what Benedict mentions later in V. 11: "He who has ears to hear, listen to what the Spirit says to the Churches". Benedict took the V. 10 from the invitatory Ps 94(95),8, and inserted it here as divine voice which cries daily, and we listen with thunderstruck ears. "Today, when you hear his voice, harden not your hearts." "His" voice is evidently the voice of the Lord Christ, and he shouts to us daily through the psalm, and wants to reach the ear of our heart. When that word "today" resounds in the early morning, our ear is like thunderstruck; the verse is like a trumpet which shakes us and awakens us. We remember that Benedict wants the Ps 94(5) sung as invitatory every day in the Vigil. Now it is up to us how we behave. We should be open in the most interior self, which is our heart, and take in this voice, which includes also the whole psalm. We become aware that it is an important and existential admonition at the beginning

of each day. The Lord is the rock of our salvation, a great king; depths and heights, sea and dry land are in his hands; and he is our creator, "we are the flock of his hand." It is really a loving voice, which reaches our ears, and a mighty one. It wants to penetrate our ear of the heart. But just being confronted with love we are sometimes tempted to close our heart. This psalm verse describes it as hardening of the heart, making it like stone, letting all that comes slide off. We do not want to be stirred up. The heart can be hardened through laziness, through pride or refusal of changing something. Maybe somebody fears the consequences of what is heard. These possibilities exist in us as they existed in the Israelites, as the psalm sings. So it is crucial to listen with the ear of our heart, not only with our exterior ears.

Our – maybe exterior – ears are struck like with thunder. But the inner ear is able to listen to the message contained in it. Surely we need confidence and love to decipher the message of God's power and love. But we have to unveil our heart before him, to lay it bare and naked before this loving Lord; then he can act. We are servants, humble creatures, benefiting from the powerful goodness of our Lord, and now making a good use of this *kairos* (a special point of time).

The same happens in the next verse "Who has ears to hear, should hear what the Spirit says to the Churches." Our exterior ears take in some sounds. But what do they mean, from where do they come? It is the voice of the Spirit, and his message can only be understood by the ear of the heart. We are reminded of our baptism where our ears symbolically were opened. This symbol shows that from now on they are capable to perceive the deeper message of Christ. And again we do not need to fear, it is only love and mercy reaching us, sometimes overwhelming us.

In the same paragraph (Prol 12) Christ says: "Come, my children, listen to me, I will teach you the fear of God." If we try to have the concrete scene before our eyes, we become aware that we have to come near to him; his voice is so soft and gentle, that we cannot hear it from afar. We need an effort to walk near to him and to listen very hard, yes, to incline the ear of our heart into the direction where our teacher of wisdom is talking. All these efforts make sense, if we are convinced of the importance of this soft voice for us. We put all our attention to it and become ourselves silent so that we are able to perceive his voice (cf 1 Kings 19,12). It does not overpower us, but is very gentle, thus showing the tenderness of our Lord. In the first paragraph we were inclining the ear of our heart to the precepts, admonitions and word of a kind Father and a Master, who can be Benedict, God or Christ. Now it becomes still clearer that it is the Master of Wisdom: Christ talking to us through Holy Scripture. And also this can be either like thunder or like a gentle breeze.

After having read this paragraph we see how important for Benedict this listening is: listening to the word, to the presence of the Lord, obedience to him, and following what we heard; putting into practice the fear of God, doing the good, finally running the way, always listening to the guidance of the Gospel. It is clear that this listening of the heart is a gift of the Lord in baptism, which we can either spoil or treasure.

The other usages of listening in the Prologue reflect the multiformity of life. The Lord precedes our actions. He shouts inviting us: "Who wants to have life?" (Prol 14), and V. 16: "if, hearing him you answer" "Yes", then the Lord wants a more concrete answer from us; he makes himself so to say dependent on us. Do you say "yes", or "wait a bit", or simply "no"? Benedict presupposes we answer "yes". Of course we want to have life. Listening with our heart will bring us life, and a happy life, but the Lord also goes deeper and requires actions from us: "to keep our tongue from vicious talk ... to avoid evil and to do good, to seek peace and pursue it". These are consequences, but also remove barriers and make it easier to listen more attentively to him. The V. 18 mentions one aspect of this happiness: God's eyes and ears are upon us and directed to our plea. So he is totally present and available to us (cf 2 Chron

6,40). Prol 18 says: "Before you call on me, I will say 'Ecce adsum'", "Here I am." And Benedict is right, when he says: "What can be sweeter, than this voice of the Lord?" (Prol 19) Here our words can no more express and explain the depth, and we listen silently to his presence. We can see a similarity to the experience of Moses with God in the thorn-bush: "I am here – for you". And, of course, we would like to say also a total "ecce adsum" (here I am) to his challenging gentle or loud voice.

The Lord called, to go his ways under the guidance of the Gospel, which means that we have to incline so to say all the time our heart's ear to our guide, Christ, and walk his ways, in his footsteps and so reach the final happy goal of our life: "to see him" (Prol 21).

The Prologue repeats several times that the Lord cries out to us or shouts; and we listen and put into action what we heard or run in the indicated direction. This form of the Prologue (with its repetitions) made me at first really angry, because it is always beginning anew, and very often with the Lord who says something, and we listen, again and again. I could not find a logical structure. But diving more and more into the Prologue and walking some years with it, I slowly understood, that this is just the mirror of our life. Again and again the Lord calls us, and it is not enough to "listen with the ear of our heart" once and for all, but again and again, maybe on different levels. There is no end to it, until we reach eternal life, which Benedict describes later like this: "what ear has not heard nor eye has seen, God prepared for those who love him" (4,77). It is not the logic of literature but of life.

We note another listening in Prol 24f. We asked the Lord who would dwell in his tent, and after this we listen to him how he answers and shows us the way to the tent. An active listening, knowing that all depends on it, a listening with one big attentive ear! - At the end of this passage (Prol 33) Benedict quotes the Sermon on the Mount: "He who listens to my words and puts them into practice, is like a wise man...". The promise for our listening is: We can build a stable house on the rock, who evidently is Christ. Here we can think back and remember the contents of the Sermon on the Mount. It is not always sweet and agreeable, what Christ says. The exterior ears hear e.g. "Blessed are those who are persecuted" (5,10); "who is angry with his brother, will answer for it before the court" (5,22); "offer no resistance to the wicked" (5,38); "do not judge" (7,1). And we could go on. We could become angry or revolted, hearing this voice of the Lord. We could maybe even cover (with our hands) our exterior ears ... Different reactions are possible. But here we take it in with our open ears, and our inner ear. The ear of our heart deciphers what Christ wants to tell me personally through all these words. And if he admonishes us or gives us direction, it is always for our good, and we can have a sure place where we belong: the house on the rock. And the rock is Christ.

But it is not yet enough of listening; in the last verse of a – maybe - first conclusion, the Prologue says: "Having listened to the precepts, we want to fulfil the duties of an inhabitant of the tent "(Prol 39). In a sense a full listening of the heart includes already the doing what Christ asked. In Greek it is clear: ακούω, ὑπακούω: listening, hearing and obeying. These two concepts are linked.

May be you found it boring, but I just want to be faithful to Benedict, as he repeats over and over to his brothers this main imperative: "listen, incline the ear of your heart!" And it is clear that it is a deep and always deeper listening. What we thus hear, is always the voice of the Lord, who in the Prologue speaks mainly through Holy Scripture. It is a very existential and lively dialogue. The Bible is like the living person of the Lord, listening also to us, being ear and eye for us putting questions and answers to us; and we, in listening can come nearer and nearer to him and so hear his voice and message more and more clearly. The consequence of this deep listening is a good life, a life being guided by him, fulfilling his precepts, being obedient and finally a sure place where to dwell and at the end arriving at our goal and see him (Prol 21).

The very last paragraph of the Prologue does not have explicitly the word "listening", but it says that we run the way of God's commandments with unspeakable sweetness of love, "as our heart expand", which in the original language is in the singular. When we take the picture of the listening ear of the heart, I suppose that with the heart expanding, also the ear will expand and be able to take in more attentively all that the Lord's voice has to tell us personally, good news, practical imperatives, conditions to have a good and happy life. Listening might not just be confined to the sounds of the word, but to the whole existential surrounding.

The whole Prologue is constructed like a dialogue between the listening ear of the heart and the powerful but sweet, challenging and good and promising voice of the Lord. The consequence will be that we have peace of heart, which on the other hand is also a condition to really listen, maybe expressed by a stable house, and that we follow his direction with all our heart. The Prologue makes it clear that inclining the ear of our heart we also become happy. The Lord has his eyes and ears open to us, he will say "ecce adsum", "here I am" (Prol 18), like in Exodus 3,14: I am with you, I will walk with you and before you. Have confidence and follow me. Our ear inclined to him, is open, but also our eyes are open to the deifying light from him. We will already note that the ear is not isolated from the eyes, though the ear has the most important place.

3. Listening and seeing (yesterday and today - philosophy and theology)

In order to perceive the importance of listening, and the relation to seeing, it is good to note just some ideas from philosophical or theological currents today and yesterday (with simplifications), before we go again to the Rule of Benedict. Maybe it is too much known that the seeing and the eyes are more important in the Greek culture, and the word, hearing and listening in the Hebrew culture. I quote some sentences of Philo of Alexandria (1. century), standing so to say for the Greek current: "The ears are slow and more feminine than the eyes who courageously are the first to turn to the visible objects without having to wait that they come to us. The hearing comes only in the second place, the eyes are higher and more important."² The eye has to do with knowledge, insight. The seeing permits a distance between the subject and the object; the eye catches the whole panorama in one moment, and it permits also a freedom of choosing. Urs von Balthasar thinks that from earliest times seeing is held universally to be the noblest sense, that which discloses reality in the greatest depth. The world thus can be possessed and dominated.³

The hearing is different. The utterances and communications come upon us, without our being informed in advance, lay hold on us, without our previous asking. The voice of the other discloses the inner mystery; it is the bearer of revelation. The one listening is in the subordinate position of humble receiving. The hearer belongs to the one who talks and can demand obedience. God waits patiently from outside, in order to make himself heard by the listening ear of our heart. "Let the one who has ears, hear".⁴ The listening Church stands under the Word of God. Obedience building on this act of hearing is the form of her service and of her readiness to serve. Faith comes from hearing (see Rom 10,17). - Here I want also to insert some thoughts of Schwager and Carotta (in their articles), who refer to Alfred Tomatis, a French doctor. Tomatis showed from medicine how deeply the human being is rooted in the hearing. This is in harmony with K. Rahner, that the human being is mainly a hearer of the word. The ear is so to say an antenna to the human beings, to reach into its surrounding and thereby to enter into communication.⁵ Again Tomatis: to listen is more than to receive passively; there are many forms of an active assimilation and feeding back, finally a maximum of inner coordination. If the listening is weak, then even the voice loses right away its security.⁶ Also the slow working on the words is important. The affectivity of the sound, coming with the voices, has considerable consequences. The different vibrations go to the

² Philo, *De Abrahamo*, ed., Jean Goretz, Paris 1966, 147.

³ Hans Urs von Balthasar: *Explorations in Theology, II, Spouse of the Word*, San Francisco 1991, 474.

⁴ *Id.*, 480, see 476-479.

⁵ Raymund Schwager: *Hörer des Wortes*, - *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie* 114(1992) 1-3.

⁶ Tomatis in Schwager, 3-4.

whole body and can provoke wellness or excitement, or simply tiredness.⁷ Tomatis showed also that special music like Gregorian Chant and Mozart have an educative power for the ear and the whole person.⁸ - The ear is the first organ developed in the foetus. The being becomes a human being through listening. The true listening consists in praying, and Christ was the only one capable of real listening .⁹

The hearing is at the root of the human being, as Rahner says;¹⁰ the person is essentially the hearer, and is capable of the infinite, of the eternal. The true word is important, especially for the interpersonal communication, and often we suffer from the inability to listen. Bonhoeffer thinks that he who can no longer listen to his brother will soon be no longer listening to God either...; and this is the beginning of the death of the spiritual life. Or he listens only with half an ear. But for all who have a ministry, the listening is much more important than the speaking.¹¹ He describes it as an attitude of the whole person to the whole world, to persons, events and things.

Listening is full adhesion to God. And so the human person acquires wisdom. The heart is the main organ to listen (cf the listening heart in 1 Kings 3,9). God speaks to the heart. One thing only is necessary (cf Mary in Lk 10,38-42). With the importance of listening, the condition of relationship and dialogue, obedience and humility and non-violence is also clear.

4. The words "audire" and their context (in the Rule of Benedict, in comparison with the Rule of the Master)

In this fourth chapter I will hold on to the Latin words (audire, auditus, auris), in English: "to hear, hearing and ear". Then we have a more secure basis to go further in the next chapter. - We find all these words around listening 35 times in the Rule of Benedict. The word "videre" (to see) is used much less. Often the expression "we see" (or similar) is used in the sense of "it seems". It is more important that God sees us, looks down from heaven, ("videre" and other synonymous words): in the Rule of Benedict four times; plus two times Benedict says that in heaven we will see him (Prol 21; cf 4,77). Generally we could say that the Rule of Benedict inclines more to "hearing", but does not neglect totally the "seeing", and sometimes Benedict has the two expressions together (Prol 9. 18; 4,77).

To listen in the strong sense (auscultare, obscultare) is only mentioned once, but as the first word of the whole Rule. Because of this position it has great importance (see second chapter).

The vis-à-vis of our ear of the heart is often the Bible. This is still clearer in the other usages of "audire". RB 4,55 admonishes us to listen willingly to Holy Scriptures (lectiones libenter audire). Maybe we no longer perceive that this is not the normal picture we use in connection with the Bible. We would rather express ourselves like: "to read willingly", which means: with our eyes. Instead it is more fitting for the first centuries to say: "to listen willingly to Holy Scriptures", which means to have our ear in the Bible. Even if the monks were able to read, they would normally pronounce the words with their mouth, and so the Holy words enter in a twofold way into the person; through the eyes and through the ears. - In the "Confessions" Augustine talks about a surprise observing Ambrose reading Holy Scripture: "When he read, his eyes were guided through the pages, and the heart investigated the intelligence; but the voice and the mouth were quiet ... , so we saw him reading in silence".¹² Benedict still seems to know the acoustic reading, so he has to

⁷ Tomatis in *ibid.*, 6-7.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰ Cf Sandro Carotta: *L'Ascolto*, - *l'Ulivo* 26(2006) 105-107 (*La sconfitta di Dio*, Milano 1992, 82f).

¹¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, New York 1976, 97-99.

¹² "Sed cum legebat, oculi ducebantur per paginas et cor intellectum rimabatur, vox autem et lingua quiescebant sic eum legentem vidimus taciter". (*Confessions*, 6,3).

mention specially that during siesta the monks may read for themselves (*legere sibi*, - 48,5). It is deep silence, when they read only with their eyes. But the immediate source, the Rule of the Master, often talked about the fact that special monks read to others, and a group of brothers is listening (see e.g. RM 50,11.15.64). It is more often than in the Rule of Benedict an acoustic reading.

One important part of the Bible is especially put into the ear of the brothers towards the end of the liturgy with the expression "while all are listening" (*omnibus audientibus*): and this is the "Our Father", one of the most revered parts of Holy Scripture, taught by Jesus himself. It seems that all say the second part which contains the phrase that Benedict wants to emphasize: "forgive us as we forgive" (RB 13,12). The inclining of the ear of our heart implies that we try hard to really forgive. Of course it can only be done in the grace the Lord gives us. The immediate source of Benedict did not speak of the "Our Father" in the liturgy.

The table reading (see RB 38) has Holy Scripture as its core. This becomes clear especially when we consider the probable source: the Rule of Augustine. The mouth takes in food, and the ears desire the word of God.¹³ Together with other observations we can affirm that the most important part of the table reading was Holy Scripture surrounded by the explanations of the Fathers, their expositions to the Bible (e.g. also 8,9; 73,2-4; 42,3f). Instead the immediate source, the Rule of the Master, has the same Rule he wrote, read generally; or if there are visitors from outside, just some other book (e.g. RM 24,20-22). In this context Benedict does not use the verb "audire" (to hear, or to listen), but in fact it is the leitmotiv of this chapter as the monks are called "listeners" (*audientes*). The brothers on the one hand listen to Holy Scripture, and on the other hand to the needs of their neighbours, so that there is no need to ask for anything (38,6f). - It is in agreement with a good listening that the function of the reading is some times described with "aedificatio", edification (38,12; 38,5, see 38,9). The community is "edified", constructed by listening to the Holy Word. Could we ask more concretely: what will be edified, constructed, strengthened or built up? It is not something material, but spiritual. Of course most of the commentators point to "faith". But in this line, being in tune with our theme, we could say: our heart should be the temple of the Lord, and this temple has to be constructed and fortified, so that it becomes a beautiful dwelling place for him. We have to incline the ear of our heart often to Holy Scripture, so that the heart, his temple be strongly edified and not easily destroyed. The same holds for a new element that Benedict introduces: the reading before Compline, which has also as a nucleus Holy Scripture, but only those parts which edify the hearers, besides the works of Cassian and the lives of the Fathers, those parts contributing to edification (42,3.4) of the individual monk and the community. - We may add another reference which is important in this context. In RB 47 Benedict talks about the one who reads and proclaims the reading: he should not try to show the own capacity and facility of the language, but announce the Holy words to the hearers with the spiritual qualities of humility, gravity and reverence so that the listeners be edified (47,3). - The slow reading, so good for the ear of the heart, is also a practical consequence of the old codes, where there is no punctuation or interval between the words. This constrains the reader to read slowly (and to prepare well), and has as consequence that those who hear can take in every word.

The abbot after having fulfilled his charge well, hears what the good servant heard who gave to his fellow servants the food in the right time... "He (the Lord) will set him over all his goods" (64,22). It is a beautiful and consoling word that his heart takes in.

There are some usages of hearing in the first chapters of our Rule. In 6,6 Benedict says that it is proper to the disciple to be silent and to listen. With this verse one important condition of listening is mentioned. One who talks and chatters all the time does not have a ready ear, that can be inclined, especially not a ready ear of the heart. In Latin the word "tacere" is used, which contains also

¹³ « Nec solae fauces sumant cibum, sed et aures esuriant dei verbum », - Praeceptum 2,2.

peace of heart. In this sense we can add: it is necessary to overcome anger, hostile emotions, murmuring, different kinds of revolt, and bring to peace our heart in order to be able to listen to the Lord's loving voice. ¹⁴

RB 5 clarifies that to hear well implies also to obey. In the context of obedience he mentions two times that one should listen to the abbot, and every time with the scriptural motivation, "who hears you, hears me" (5,6.15). We have to presuppose RB 2, where the superior is admonished, that, having taken the place of Christ, his teaching should also be in harmony with the law of the Lord (2,5). In this chapter 5 Benedict stresses that the monks obey quickly. They are like the disciples of the Gospel who right away, after the call of Jesus, leave everything (see Mk 1,18-20). Swiftiness is to be emphasized in a milieu where the brothers may be rather slow or inflexible and stubborn, or even lazy. So the Rule has to stress the listening and quick executing what the monks heard. They even have to leave unfinished what they were doing (see RB 5,8). This phrase catches us right away. We, who have so many things to do – how often after a call or a knock at our door we have to leave unfinished the things we were doing before! Somehow in the same line we hear (audire) the sign for the divine office and break off from the work right away (43,1), although we think, we are right in the middle of an important task. Of course we will not follow this precept legalistically or even stupidly! But if we practice this letting go according to Benedict, and thereby express our appreciation for the divine office, we can experience the blessing of it, also for our service.

The next text occurs not with the word "audire" but in fact it is in the context of listening and obeying to the abbot. Sometimes it is easy to hear the voice of the Lord in the abbot's voice, sometimes it is difficult. In the parallel chapter of RB 4 (Instruments of good works), the immediate source had said "to be obedient to the admonitions of the abbot" (3,67). In the parallel text Benedict adds something in 4,61, that probably comes from his own experience. It breaks the proportions of the sentences before and afterwards, when he adds to the original verse: "even if his own conduct – which God forbid – be at odds with what he says, remembering the teaching of the Lord: 'Do what they say, not what they do' (Mt 23,3)". It is interesting that the inconsistency of the abbot is no excuse from listening with the ear of the heart and executing the order; on the contrary: it means, going deeper. What is it through all of this that God wants from me, he, who writes straight on crooked lines? The command of the abbot who does not do what he commands, does not dispense the monks from listening and doing. Here we can also perceive the difference of superficial listening with the ears of the body, or also the seeing with our two eyes, and the deeper reality of the will of God, which can only be deciphered with the ear of the heart. We recognize at least two levels of listening. Augustine says, following you are with the good shepherd who cares for you. ¹⁵

It is amazing: In the Rule of Benedict this listening does not relate to Holy Scripture and the words of the authority or the sign for the liturgy, but also the abbot listens to the brothers (3,2). He takes care to have all the brothers assembled and wants to hear their advices whenever any important business has to be done (3,1-2). However it is not that easy to just listen and do, but as different views are uttered, he has to discern and listen again to the Lord which advice is best. One important sentence not to be forgotten in this discernment is: "The Lord often reveals to the younger what is better (3,3)." So it is mainly a listening to the Lord who speaks through human mediators and preferably through the younger brothers, although not automatically! It is the paradox of our God who reveals his message to the little and simple ones (cf Mt 11,25).

Coming back to the title, it indicates so to say one direction, where we incline the ear of our heart. Even if exteriorly we listen to different sides of the brothers, the ear of the heart is inclining to the Lord, what through all the different voices he wants to say.

¹⁴ Cf Kevin O'Farrel : Peace of Heart, - Tjurunga 2012, 83, 5-8.

¹⁵ See Aquinata Böckmann : Christus hören, zum Vers 4,61, St. Ottilien 2011, 273, 272.

However the Rule of Benedict has also once a sentence that the brothers could see or hear something harmful, but this is being on a journey (67,4), and the brothers should not tell it around (67,5); they could cause very great harm. When we think a short while about our situation, then we have to say our monasteries cannot be so much separated from the outside that bad talking would not enter our spheres (we think also of the modern means of communication). But Benedict in his time could still try to keep his monastery free from harmful or bad chatter or lies and calumnies of the people outside. Our interpretation today has to be broader. I suppose we are more accustomed to this kind of talking. - Again it is clear, that there are at least two levels of hearing: listening with the two ears of the body, and with this taking in maybe also the harmful words, and then the interior inclining of the ear of the heart, sorting it out, and closing it to bad things, and only taking in facts that could – even in a bad context – be of some use and profit to us and our community; this means God can use different means and situations to convey some message of his.

Taking into account the root of the word “listen” (audire auditus) , we are not the only ones who listen with the ear of our heart. We saw already that God has his ears towards us, and he hears or “answers” (exaudire). “And not with many words but in purity of heart and in compunction of tears we will be heard” (exaudire, - 20,3). In one dictionary I found as translation for “exaudire” the expression: “to incline the ear”. Yes, God inclines also the ear of his heart to our voice. The Rule of the Master does not have this word, but the Bible mentions it often.

So it is an attentive listening and inclining the ear on both sides. Augustine has a beautiful sentence of the two partners and our listening: to put the ear of my heart to his mouth.¹⁶ This is a good picture of our theme. Really on the other side is the mouth of God, for Benedict more specifically the mouth of Christ. And we have to put the ear of our heart near to his mouth, so that we get everything. We can link to this the expression of the Prologue where the Lord said: “My ears will listen to your prayers” (Prol 18). God’s listening is undisturbed attention, loving openness to us. God himself is the model of listening with the ear of his heart open to us. From on high he goes down and inclines his ear to us low people, to the poor and miserable, and thus shows his love.¹⁷ It is a mutual listening, and the hearts are brought together in love and obedience.

Applying the findings of the preceding paragraph, we have to say, that the Rule of Benedict is very feminine, not being intent on dominating but on humility and non-violence. Listening with the ear of the heart, we as persons should be made capable to wait for the word, and to desire it, coming always more close to the Lord.

5. The fact of listening with the ear of the heart (Rule of Benedict compared with his immediate source)

Listening happens in the Rule more often, than the word (to hear) occurs. Going through the whole Rule we experience how much Benedict listened to the different ways of monastic life of the Orient and of the Occident. As for his liturgical code, he listened in depth how different monasteries celebrated the liturgy, he listened and discerned what would be good for his community.

¹⁶ Confessiones, IV,5 “Possumne audire abs te, qui veritas es, et admovere aurem cordis mei ori tuo, ut dicas mihi, cur fletus dulcis sit miseris?” Cf Fulgentius, Ep 14 « aurem cordis admovens apostolicis dictis ». Aponius in the fifth century has a still more concrete answer: the virgin is solicitous to always tend the ear of her heart to the voice of Christ, which means the Sacred Scriptures” (and then he talks also about the need of prayer) - in Cant Cant IV,11.

¹⁷ Augustinus, In Ps 85, 2.

In the correction code, he would not only fix and establish the appropriate remedies for the sinner by looking at the outside and actions of the persons, but he would listen to their capacities and attitudes, in order to be aware if they understood the means of correction and how they could be best receive healing.¹⁸

In the middle section of the Rule, Benedict listened to the capacities and physical and psychological strength of his monks (as for table service, food and drink and public reading). He was guided by discernment and discretion,¹⁹ both could be called the outcome of listening.

According to the chapter of the oratory (RB 52), the monk can "simply go in and pray". He listened to the impulse of divine grace, and did what it indicated. Already before, in RB 20 about personal prayer, although Benedict would have liked to have it short and pure, he counted with the fact that the inspiration of the divine grace could prolong it. In this way life becomes simple through deep listening and following the call of the Lord.²⁰

Especially the chapters on hospitality have many acts and attitudes of listening, of inclining the ear of one's heart. At the beginning stands a prayer together, where the monks surely listened to the wishes and opinions of their vis-à-vis and at the same time to what God wanted to say, and only then the kiss of peace was given. After having taken part in the liturgy, the prior, or somebody appointed, should sit with the guest and read the Bible for edification. He had to listen at first, and only then could he read the divine Law as an answer to it. This is a very relevant model for us in our ministry of spiritual direction! Benedict wants us to listen very, very deeply with the ear of our heart to the different persons, especially to the poor and strangers, until finally we hear and discover Christ in them and also their very deep needs. As we have also listened deeply to Holy Scriptures we know which parts talk to the guest for his good or have a healing effect.²¹

In another chapter of receiving, the porter (RB 66) answered: "Deo gratias"; he inclined his ear like to somebody higher, and again with the word: "give me a blessing", he knew himself to be dependent on the newcomer. The porter should respond, - this is said four times and implies that he had listened before. So he might also say "no" to a request, feeling that it is not good for the guest to have a special thing, or generally that his wish be fulfilled.

I will take now three chapters, which do not have the word "to listen", but in fact contain it as basic reality. At first I will consider RB 64, 2nd part (on the abbot), then RB 65 (on the prior) and finally RB 68 (on difficult commands). These three chapters are full of listening. (It would be good to take the texts!)

RB 64,8-19

RB 64, 8 says: "Let him (the abbot) know that his duty is rather to profit than to preside" (over the brothers). To preside (praeesse) means to be the first, but to profit (prodesse) entails to be useful. For one monk a special command is useful, for another one not at all. Consequently in order to feel what really profits, the abbot has to listen at first in depth to the different brothers. - RB 64,9 admonishes the superior to be learned in the divine law, in order to bring forth new and old things. As Benedict mentioned before,

¹⁸ See Aquinata Böckmann: *Geeint in Christus*, St. Ottilien, 2013, 151, 155, 223,

¹⁹ Aquinata Böckmann: *Around the Monastic Table*, Collegette 2009,75-257. (dies: *Geeint in Christus*, St. Ottilien, 225-491.

²⁰ Dies., 633-635, 639f.

²¹ Dies., *Openness to the World and Separation from the World according to RB*, - *American Benedictine Review* 37(1986)304-322

with Holy Scripture we have before all to listen to the biblical message, in order to come to wisdom. And all of us know that we may not only listen to one book but to the whole Bible, as "lectio divina" teaches us. The abbot who is learned in the Bible knows if it is good to bring out now the Old or now the New Testament. It depends again on the capacity and situation of the brothers which passage will profit them.

The Verses 64,11- 14 show the abbot administering correction with love and prudence. He must scrape off the rust, but may not break the vessel. All these admonitions imply that he puts the brother in the centre of his thinking and has insight in his person and longings, so that he can scrape off the rust, but neither break the brother nor crush the bruised reed. The abbot must have listened a long time to be able to act like this. There is one significant expression: "as it is expedient for everyone". He listens to the brothers in their differences: the one needs more prudence, the other more charity, the one needs that the vices are eradicated totally, with another one, the abbot cannot do this. He must maybe simply pray, or he can only eradicate the worst of weeds. Otherwise he would destroy the person. - "Expedire" – translated as "expedient" means literally: get the foot out of the snare (composed by the word: "pes" - foot, and the preposition "ex" - out). All the brothers in this or the other sense are tied down by something, and they are to be freed from this - maybe little - snare. Sometimes a person outside me, can see it better, than myself. - The middle of 64, second part, says that the abbot must have his frailty always before his eyes. Although this has to do mainly with seeing (suspectus), it means also that the abbot listened to himself, not only to the nice but also to the dark sides.

Especially important is RB 64,16. The list of qualities, or "non-qualities", brings us six aspects of listening. - If the abbot is turbulent and excitable, he has not the freedom to listen, he reacts too quickly and spontaneously, and by this is impeded to listen in-depth. - If he is too anxious, he will not listen to the strong brothers, or those with modern ideas, because he fears. - If he is extreme (nimius), "outside the measure" in this or the other way, e.g. a traditionalist, or too much inclined to change, he will not easily consider other views. He might not listen well to the brothers, who are aware of the needs of this time and future, or who are not enough aware of the tradition. - If he is obstinate, he seems to know better, and the others do not know. So he is tempted to just defend his views. - If he is jealous, it will be difficult for him to accept that some brother has a better opinion of what is right and needed, but which did not come from himself. - If he is over - suspicious, Benedict already tells us he will never be at rest; and a certain quietness, or peace of heart is a condition for the capacity to listen deeply. - It is interesting that all these "non-qualities" impede true listening.

In 64,17-19 Benedict depicts a listening abbot. At first he is circumspect. It means that he listens in openness to what comes to him from different sides, and then he takes prudent measures. Another word that characterizes him is to consider. He observes, weighs, reflects, discerns, which also implies a listening ear. He has before him examples of discretion, he listens to all aspects, and inclines the ear of his heart to what is according to the plans of God. Then only he decides, how to walk ahead with his community. - And he listens not only to the weak, but also to the strong, - with this we could say to all the different types of monks to discern how they could be challenged, what they need, as he shows in the chapters 39-42, and also which direction the community should take. Listening with the ears of the body is not enough; he has to go deeper, and feel what God says through all of this, and then he has to decide in a spirit of stewardship. As the abbot is always put into question from this and another side, he has to continually listen with the ears of his body and incline the ear of his heart to God's plans. The consequence of this listening will be the unity of the community walking to their goal.

Already in RB 2 Benedict had admonished the abbot to adapt himself to every one. There are stubborn and dull brothers, undisciplined and restless, negligent and disdainful, but also docile, patient and obedient ones (2,25f). If Benedict says, that the abbot adapts himself to these persons, he will try to be free from prejudice, free for the surprises that come to him, and respond with

respect. In RB 4, Benedict will say: "to honour all persons" (4,8). This attitude implies also to our theme. We will not hurt the persons by judging harshly and so to say listening from above to below. And explicitly in 2,31 Benedict states for the abbot: "He must know what a difficult and demanding burden he has undertaken: directing souls and serving a variety of temperaments, coaxing, reproving and encouraging them as appropriate". He has to give an account for everybody (2,37).

So we can summarize: He has to use the ears of his body to see the differences of realities which are around him, his interior ear to be attentive to the needs, the measures, the capacities, the limits of his brothers and of himself. At the same time he will deepen this listening inclining the ear of his heart to the plan and promise of the Lord.

RB 65:

This is a very hard chapter. Can it tell us something about listening? In the first part 65,1-13 it shows us the result of Benedict's listening with the two ears of his body to his neighbourhood and to what different monasteries experienced with a prior. He condemns fiercely that the same bishop or the same abbots should appoint both abbot and prior. The bad consequences are described. And when we should have to continue, may be we would come to the same conclusion: "no prior". Benedict gives also reasons for what he judges the best: the system of the deaneries (65,11-13). Only then follows a significant "but". He must listen still more deeply, that is inclining the ear of his heart. "But if local conditions demand it", - he has to bow before the reality. May be many guests, poor and strangers come, and the abbot is occupied with them, while the community at the same time would need a responsible person present (65,14). Then follows a second condition: "if the community asks reasonably and humbly... ". Although - it seems - the abbot has not called an official community meeting on this specific point, - in the beginning he seemed too convinced of his own opinion, - but here the community brings up a point that is probably not scheduled: namely to have a prior. Benedict is wise allowing a meeting, and then putting conditions to the request: The brothers ask with reasons, why it is necessary; and this means, that they really have thought it through. Also they should ask humbly, not being convinced that they have the only solution; this would show that they are open to God's will, whether so or so. And then we read still a last condition that the abbot judges it to be expedient: (expedire): It brings their or his feet out of snares and difficulties. Very quietly the Rule says: "Then he can choose a prior" (65,15). This is really very challenging for the abbot, who was so much against the prior, and he had listened to many realities. Now, he listens deeper and inclines humbly the ear of his heart, and puts aside his very strong opinions; he is attentive to the needs of the community. He surely is aware that a prior would take some or many of his responsibilities, and that this question concerns him very personally. But God talks through the community to the ear of his heart: it is reasonable, the reality is such, the new solution will make us free... While the first part was very emotional, even angry, these later sentences now are very quiet and show that Benedict discerned before God, and in this case inclined his ear to the community.

For the question, who of the brothers could be the prior, Benedict has a small council of the God-fearing seniors to give him names. In the next verses follow reflections about the behaviour of the prior: He will be dependent on the abbot and obedient to the Rule. This chapter is one of the most astonishing ones of the Rule of Benedict; he puts aside his former opinions and follows a new trend or new necessities, with all the risks, which he also enumerates. But the last sentence admonishes also the abbot not to be jealous, because it could happen that he feels to be less loved than the prior. The risk of comparing is great. It can also be that the prior because of bad behaviour has to be deposed, but the organisation remains in place. How easy would it be to say: "You see now, what I told you from the beginning: it is not good to have a prior." But Benedict is loyal to his community, and even if for the first time it did not function too well, he is open for other brothers as priors.

RB 68:

The last chapter I would like to mention, where inclining the ear of the heart takes place, is RB 68. Before, Benedict had already made clear how the hearing, listening and obeying are linked. Now talks the elder Benedict who has made many experiences. (RB

68 belongs to the chapters added later). The brother hears the command, and he is admonished to receive it and to try it out. But then the brother who listened to the abbot, now listens also to his own limits, possibilities, capacities, experiences... , and God's message in all of this. Now he sees that it is altogether too much. So he goes back to the superior, but he chooses a good time and place, he talks patiently, without contradiction and explains the matter. With this he makes it also easier for the superior to listen. And it seems that the superior really listens, inclines the ear of his heart to the younger monk. Through all of this, what is the Lord telling the two persons? There is attention and openness on the two sides. At the end after the listening, the superior might persist in his command, and we can ask: why? Is he just obstinate? It seems to me that this attitude can be a sort of an encouragement, he sees deeper than the younger monk, he listened often to his capacities, and holds him capable of fulfilling the command, and taking the responsibility. He knows the young monk will grow through it. Did not all of us experience, that through some challenges, which seemed at first above our strength, we grew even stronger, and we developed capacities? And so Benedict says: "let him know it is expedient", in a picture: He gets his feet free, and "out of love and confident in the help of God he obeys". "With the help of God", may allude to the ejaculatory prayer: "God come to my assistance....", which he now maybe prays more often than before. The whole chapter reminds me strongly of the passage of the Annunciation in Lk 1,26-38. The words of the Angel to Mary..... and then the short dialogue – how can it be? There are no possibilities ... , the explanation of the Angel and finally the "fiat mihi" (be done to me) of our Lady. To God nothing is "impossible". Mary inclined the ear of her heart; also in RB 68 the monk and the abbot did it. And the outcome will be good, bringing freedom and love, but Benedict does not say that it is a success or 100 % sure, and may be there has to be another listening.

It is interesting to note that all the three chapters: 64, 65 and 66 have the word "expedire". The challenge and the listening in the depth makes people free.

We could go through more chapters and feel how Benedict listened and inclined the ear of his heart to this and the other side and then especially to God. Therefore our Rule is so balanced and teaches everywhere discretion. In a time when individualism is favoured, some might claim: "please, listen only to us". "Do not consider the other side". But the ears listen to two sides, and inclining the ear of the heart, one listens to what God says through all the parts, and what he wants us to do. In a picture one could evoke the "inclinato capite" (7,63) at the end of chapter 7; it is linked with the expression that the monks looks to the ground. Yes, God's writing is imprinted in the ground, in the earth of the persons and community.

6. Barriers in listening and answering (it is good to take the text)

In a last and short, so to say unfinished part, I will try to look through some chapters of the Rule of Benedict in regards to impediments of listening. We could see in the community of Benedict some behaviours which impede listening, like murmuring, grumbling, contesting, beating, defending, wanting obstinately something at all costs (RB 36). We could call all this hardened hearts. Only the ears of the body are able to hear, maybe superficially, but the person really is not open for other insights. In a picture: one sees a monk before oneself covering the two ears with his hands. The Rule of Benedict is realistic and mentions these realities or the situations where such behaviour could occur.

We could already see some barriers to listening in the negative qualities of RB 64, or in the first part of RB 65, when it seemed that Benedict was so determined not to have a prior.

We could imagine how barriers of listening and answering would have looked like in some situations, the Rule mentions. May be we recognize some more subtle ways to do this. - Now I read the Rule in the light of possible negative listening, not inclining the ear of the heart. And I will exaggerate also.

At first I imagine the council meeting. RB 64 had said clearly that the abbot himself sees his own frailties before his eyes. So he will not depict himself as the model of everybody. In the chapter of the council, we already mentioned that the abbot should listen to the younger, because the Lord often reveals to him what is best (3,3). Not admonished by Benedict, the abbot could have said²² "Keep your mouth shut, you do not yet have experience. You are really stupid, wait some years to become a more experienced monk". Or: "Do not bring modern ideas to our community." To a brother who wants to defend his view: "I already knew that you would defend this idea. As a good monk you would say...". Or: "I knew you would say this; you are really not wise to defend this opinion; a good monk would not do it". Also it can happen that he tells one brother: "Your lack of experience shows up here. I can't believe you see it really like this. You need to pray some days over it". Or also: "This problem is nothing. Wait till I tell what happened to me".

This gives a certain perspective to me what it means positively to incline the ear of our heart. The barriers in everybody which hinder this attitude have to be removed one after the other. The abbot in the Rule of Benedict is centred on the brothers, he tries to do what is expedient or useful for them (72,7). The barriers in listening come forth, because the one listening sees the other as dependent, and is judging. I would feel diminished by such a "dialogue". Happily the RB 3 says the contrary.

And happily we see also other kinds of dialogue in RB, where somebody inclines the ear of his heart. Let us look RB 31,7 where apparently a brother asks unreasonable things of the cellarer, may be too much, not useful, too elegant or superfluous. The cellarer could have said. "I knew it already ... you always want ... you are not aware of our povertyYou really do not need this, it is only your imagination". And many other things! But he is told to deny the petition reasonably, giving reasons why he cannot give, - and humbly, not putting himself over the person. For me this humility would be inclining the ear of the heart. It implies also this listening to what God tells him through the situation, and implies some help, he could give. It is Benedict's intention that also this brother goes away encouraged, not sad.

There is another situation where the cellarer does not have what the brother needs (31,13f). It is a critical situation. Of course, here the cellarer could say "Do not ask things not needed, we have not built up the substance of our monastery according to your wishes: what you have to do now is ... This thing is not necessary, it really is superfluous". - No, he tries to incline the ear of his heart, and then gives a good word, a kind reply. The request maybe reveals the poverty of the monastery and the cellarer that he does not have all the necessary things, but he accepts it and gives a reply according to the reality. Listening also means being humble before the brother.

The cellarer distributes the allotted amount (31,16). He could put the stress on the fact how generous he is, or that he will give anyhow, even if he knows for sure that the other one does not need it. He can make his power felt wanting a bit of incense (literally translated) before him. The brothers should recognize how generous he is. But here Benedict emphasizes: he should give without getting incensed (without incense).

We could think of RB 34, where the situation is: the one needs less, the one needs more. To the first somebody could say "You come from a low family, you do not need that. You surely never had this thing before, and why do you need it now? You were told already some times ... Be grateful that you are with us." And to the other brother who needs more: "Shame on you that you need so many things, you are really spoiled. What you need in this situation is a bit more of asceticism. Next time you will do without this." -

²² I took as a reference the article of Janet Malone: Listening with the Heart, - Human Development 21(2000,3)13-17 .

But no: The one who needs less is admonished to thank God for his special gift and not be sad. It is much better to need less. To the one who needs more: "I can understand, but I know also that you are trying slowly to get along with less." Benedict says "He should feel humble because of his weakness and not feel important because of the mercy shown to him." He experiences that the responsible persons and the brothers are merciful with him.

RB 36:

In the enumerated difficulty of RB 36, where the sick brother wants things not necessary (superfluous - 36,8) and makes the servers sad, a dialogue could run like this: To the sick the abbot could say: "You are really not intelligent asking these things from the brother. I will tell you what happened to my father, when he was sick. What you need is really offering some sacrifices. You are privileged to share in the sufferings of Christ, be worthy of it! Our forefathers thanked God in this situation..." And to the servant: "You are really stingy. Your problem is that you do not smile giving the things, and this is what you need to do. I knew already that this was coming up. Your problem is your lack of joyfulness."

But no: The admonition is just, try not to distress the brothers, and to the servant: try to bear him in patience. You will get a great reward.

One could find more situations in RB, which could block the listening, the inclining of the ear of one's heart to the brothers and to God who speaks through the situation. I wrote some possibilities of role plays on a sheet. And I hope this makes it clearer to us, how we could really listen and be open and radiate understanding and joy in our communities.

(next separate sheet: possible group work)

Possible group work (not belonging strictly to the Conference), some proposals

As introduction a group of the younger Sisters sits in a row: one says 3 sentences into the ear of her next neighbor like: "We will have a good time here in Rome, Sr. will be responsible for a good program for us, and we know each other already well." The second Sister listens to it, and without asking back gives what she understood to the next Sister into her ear, and so on – we compare the outcome with what was said in the beginning.

Scenes of RB with good listening and bad listening, - possible role plays ...(can also be given in writing)

- e.g. the community wants deans instead of a subprioress (RB 21; 65);
- the younger members find it hard to get up so early and speak with the elders (RB 22; 11,1);
- One cannot digest the food, and does not find it right to have only two dishes. And the kitchen brother answers (RB 39) (or S. Benedict)
- A brother who does not want to drink wine and is for a rigorous monastic asceticism with another one who is a bit lax and very fond of wine. (RB 40)
- A sister who has to read Bible passages to others (in liturgy, at table and before Compline), and another one who does not understand her way of speaking. (RB 47)
- A Sister for whom the working in garden and field is too hard, (one should instead take the time for prayer) and another one who likes the two together in balance (prayer and work) (RB 48)
- Guests who come and want to have the lunch together with the prioress – and another Sister who wants to separate them (RB 53; 56).

And so on

(In the group: two or four do the role play (negative and/or positive), the others in the group help make it more pertinent)

?Active listening- role play. Always at first repeating what the partner said, and then adding one or two sentences.