LISTEN WITH THE EAR OF YOUR HEART
CIB SYMPOSIUM 2014 – Sister Judith Ann Heble, OSB

At the end of the Symposium in 2010, the participants were asked to surface ideas of a possible topic for this symposium. It was quite clear from what we received that we should focus on LISTENING for this symposium. Thus, we have entitled this symposium, “Listen…with the ear of your heart.”

There are four components of listening in Benedictine spirituality. We are called to listen to the Scriptures, the Rule, the world around us and one another.

We will have three keynote presentations – two each day focusing on three of these components of listening.

1. Listening to God.  Presenter: Dr. Maria Pina Scanu

These presentations will focus on “listening” in the Scriptures.

In the Hebrew Scriptures or the Old Testament, we hear the great SHE MA’, Hear O Israel…. The God of the Hebrews is pictured as a God who listens to the cry of the people. God says, “I have witnessed the affliction of my people … and have heard their cry… I know well what they are suffering. Therefore I have come down to rescue them… and lead them up…”

In the Hebrew Scriptures, there is an obvious movement from “listening” to “hardness of heart”. The prophets are direct in condemning Israel’s sin as one of “not listening”, for they have become stiff-necked and stubborn. Over and over and over, the prophets pleaded, “If only you would heed the voice of God…”

In the Christian Scriptures or the New Testament, Jesus is portrayed as listening attentively to the Father. So attentive is he, that he and the Father are one. From his Baptism to his death, Jesus is our model for listening. Throughout his life, Jesus is pictured as leaving the crowds and going off to a deserted place to be absorbed in God, to be silent, to pray and to listen. In his dealings with others, he listens to those who come to him. He hears their cry and ministers to them with a loving and compassionate heart. As he prepares for death, He withdraws from the disciples to commune with his Father and to listen for the Father’s plan for him.

Dr. Maria Pina Scanu, a professor here at Sant’Anselmo, will lead us through the Scriptures inviting us to hear again God’s invitation to listen with the ear of our heart.

2. Listening in the Rule of St. Benedict. Presenter: Sister Aquinata Böckmann

Listening is the basic disposition required of all Benedictines. Our Holy Father St. Benedict instructs us on the very first page of the Rule: “Listen carefully, my child, to the master’s 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.”

“‘Listen,’ ‘Listen,’ the Rule says. ‘Listen,’ the bell says. ‘Listen,’ monastic spirituality says. And listening is what Benedictine spirituality is all about in a culture that watches but very seldom hears.”

Benedict calls us to listen within our community: to the Prioress or Abbess; to the young and the old, to the sick, to the guest; to listen to one another; to listen in prayer and silence.

Benedict calls us to listen, to dialogue with God, and to translate what we hear into action.

Who other than our dear Sister Aquinata Böckmann can best provide the insights from the Rule of St. Benedict for our listening experience on this topic.


5 The Catholic Study Bible, Psalm 95:8.


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Sister John Mananzan, a woman who has been listening to the signs of the times all of her life and responding with great compassion and courage, will challenge us to look around, to see, to listen, to put into action what we have seen and heard.

4. Listening to one another.

The fourth component of listening will be an occasion for us to practice listening during these days: in our times of silence, during our liturgies as the Word of God is proclaimed to us, in our private prayer and lectio. “The ability to listen to another, to sit silently in the presence of God, to give sober heed, and to ponder is the nucleus of Benedictine spirituality. The Word we seek is speaking in the silence within us.”

How shall we listen in the midst of all of our living and being during these days? How can we set aside what is going on at home; the problems and challenges of our communities; our own cares and concerns – to really focus on what is being said?

During our discussion and sharing sessions, we will have multiple occasions to practice listening to one another. These days, let us resolve to practice Ob audire: listen to, harken to, pay attention to.

Let us practice intentional and hospitable inclusion in our listening in the refectory, during our coffee breaks, and at our table discussions. It requires a deep listening to all of the voices at our table, not just those who speak our language or express our point of view. Everyone is important and deserves to be heard and respected. Each one’s voice and perspective matter.

This kind of listening requires an open mind and a listening heart even when the other may say something to which we do not agree. No one possesses or knows everything worth hearing and knowing. “It means putting our own needs and activities on hold while we offer hospitality to another. The way we do this is by being open to participate in conversation.”

“A good conversationalist is prepared to let others have their turn to speak. As is often said, we have two ears and only one tongue: we should listen twice as much as we speak.”

May our speaking to one another be of welcome and respect. Listen well; respond deeply. We do not need to provide solutions to what the other has said. Hear the needs of the others at your table. Listen and hear and feel what the

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6 Chittister, The Rule of Benedict, p. 61.
8 Ibid., p. 120.
other is saying.

“When we refuse to give place to others, when we consume all the space of our worlds with our own sounds and our own truths and our own wisdom and our own ideas, there is no room for anyone else’s ideas. No one is left from whom to learn.”9 “Not to listen, then, is not to grow. But more than that, to be unable to listen is to be unable to give as well.”10

“It takes a lot of listening to hear the needs of those around us before they even speak them. But there is no good human community without it. Listening and love are clearly of a piece. We must all learn to listen to the truths of those around us. Listening has something to do with being willing to change ourselves and change our world. Listening is a religious discipline of the first order that depends on respect and leads to conversion.”11

Together – in our LISTENING, we will determine how and who we will be for one another and what it is we hope to be and do. Stop, listen and heed the message of this moment. Let us incline the ear of our heart in loving listening to one another so that we can be the instrument by which the monastic charism is shared and nurtured in each of us by each of us.

To listen well, we must make room for SILENCE. Let us make the silent reflection times each day a rich opportunity for that “still small voice” to be heard in whatever way it comes to you. Silence makes it possible for us to be sensitive to all of the dimensions of who we are and to come to the heart of what is being said by the other. In the silence, let us notice, wait, and listen deeply to what simply is. Let us maintain a passive, receptive stance.

“Listen with the heart of Christ. Listen with the lover’s ear. Listen to the voice of God. Listen in your own heart for the sound of truth, the kind that comes when a piece of quality crystal is struck by a metal rod”.12


At the beginning of this Symposium, I wish to extend to you this blessing:

By our listening may we turn our souls to God. Amen.
By our listening may we turn our hearts to one another. Amen.
By our listening may we turn our entire being to a world in need of what you can give. Amen.14

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9 Chittister, Rule of Benedict, p. 60.
10 Chittister, Wisdom Distilled From the Daily, p. 18.
11 Chittister, Wisdom Distilled From the Daily, p. 19.
12 Ibid., p. 23.
13 Ibid., p. 16.
14 Pre-Chapter of Federation of St. Scholastica, June, 2013, Liturgy booklet.