

Listening to the Young

Foreword – *Starting Points: Two Experiences*

The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them. Just as love to [sic] God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them. It is God's love for us that He not only gives us His Word but also lends us His ear.

So it is His work that we do for our brother when we learn to listen to him. Christians, especially ministers, so often think they must always contribute something when they are in the company of others, that this is the one service they have to render. They forget that listening can be a greater service than speaking.

Many people are looking for an ear that will listen. They do not find it among Christians, because these Christians are talking where they should be listening. But he who can no longer listen to his brother will soon be no longer listening to God either; he will be doing nothing but prattle in the presence of God too.

This is the beginning of the death of the spiritual life, and in the end there is nothing left but spiritual chatter and clerical condescension arrayed in pious words. One who cannot listen long and patiently will presently be talking beside the point and be never really speaking to others, albeit he be not conscious of it. Anyone who thinks that his time is too valuable to spend keeping quiet will eventually have no time for God and his brother, but only for himself and for his own follies.

— [Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*](#). Translated by John W. Doberstein. New York City: Harper & Row, 1954. <https://onbeing.org/blog/on-listening-dietrich-bonhoeffers-advice-to-christians>

I believe that the Lord had asked me to subscribe to the service of LISTENING when, many years ago, I experienced my first change of House and went to live in a Formation House with the Postulants. That four-year experience obliged me to give space and time to others. It is not that I didn't use my time before this to listen to others for it had often happened that I came to know the life of the young whom I encountered. But I understood that this new obedience was requiring of me a greater depth, a qualitative leap. I no longer was to listen to the "what," but to the "how"; not to the "things to do" but to the interior movements, nameless silences, and unexpressed desires of these young women whom I encountered and who were asking me to make a specific space within me for them.

This vast dimension was thus opened and was a call to which I do not know if I responded adequately, but today I realize that it is part of me and that the Lord is asking me to cultivate this always more and more. The realization that listening is not simply an attitude but a necessary condition helps me make it a priority among the many urgent things, activities, processes, programs, and deadlines which fill my days and agenda now.

I tried asking myself how I could summarize this experience of listening in a few words or in an image. I chose this icon which represents Our Lady of Silence: Mary. This icon is part of a mural dated between the 12th and 13th centuries and is found in a cave in the region of Faras, Egypt. It is a Coptic icon. These bear the stylistic trait of huge, open eyes. The divinity listens with his eyes, and understands the other and the world through his gaze.

This is an image which is very dear to me. More than an image, it is a space in which God manifests Himself. Icons are characterized by being not only a representation of a divinity but, thanks to the Mystery of the Incarnation of Christ, it is a sacramental; i.e., it is the place where God is present and can be encountered.

What the Gospel says with words – as affirmed by the Second Council of Nicaea - the icon, the dense and substantial image of a Presence, announces it in colors and renders it present.

Standing before this icon, I am always able to encounter a precious traveling companion, who has understood everything by listening and has made it her constant condition. She is completely focused on the other, on the Son, and also on me. When I look at her, she has the power to watch over me and to put me in my place – she takes me off center stage and says: *You are relative; you are not important; God is the one who is important and listening to Him is our true place.*

These two experiences are my starting points: Living with the Postulants made me "stand still", even physically. Contemplating Mary asks me to "take myself off center stage" so as to be all eyes, listening to God.

1. Listening as a **CONDITION**

Two years ago a girl attending high school was in the midst of a very difficult situation. Every now and then we would "chat". One day, she wrote me a message: "*Sr. Paola, I have to ask you a favor. Can you listen to me even when I tell you nothing or I cannot tell you?*" I replied, "Of course!" As I answered her, I understood the request she was making: she was asking me to listen to her at all times, beyond her words, beyond our meetings, and to take care of her and remember her, for a long time to come.

This was and is most surely demanding because the persons whom we meet are not books to put in order in a closet, but are lives to be taken on. Making listening a condition has helped me expand my heart: listening to the young means restoring their dignity as persons – persons who not only have needs but who have the power to change their life. When Don Bosco used to say that the "young are our salvation," I believe, before all else, he meant this: to allow ourselves to modify our way of being, to change our inner priorities.

"To listen, it is truly difficult. To do so seriously produces a certain panic or dizziness. It means risking encountering ourselves with another distinct person. 'To live listening' means to open ourselves to communion, to allow ourselves to be surprised, to develop a passion for closeness. 'To live listening' means to take a gamble on being faithful to the teachings of reality."

--- J.C. Bermejo. *L'ascolto che sana*. Bari: La Meridiana, 2004. 11.

To live listening as a condition permits us to unhinge time, at least on a symbolic level, and, therefore, not to make the other person feel that he/she is just a number but is all that truly interests us at that moment.

And speaking of the young, welcome the young. This is a third and rather difficult thing. The young make us tired because they always have something up their sleeve, they make noise, they do this or that... And then they come and say, 'But, I would like to speak with you...' 'Yes, come'. And they ask the same questions, have the same problems: 'I already told you'. They weary us. If we want vocations: keep your door open, pray, and stay nailed to your seat to listen to the young. 'But they are full of fantasies!' May the Lord be blessed! It is up to you to 'bring them back down to earth'. Listen to them: this is the apostolate of the ear. 'They want to confess, but they always confess the same things'. 'And so did you, when you were young. Have you forgotten?' Have patience: listen, so they feel at home and welcomed; and they feel loved. And at times they will act like little kids: thank God, because they are not old. It is important to "waste time" with the young. Sometimes they can be annoying, because – as I said – they always come with the same things; but our time is theirs. More than speaking to them, you must listen to them, and only give them a 'little drop', a word here or there, and off they go. And this will be a seed that will work inside them. But he or she will be able to say, 'Yes, I was with the pastor, the priest, the Sister, the president of Catholic Action, and he or she listened to me as if he or she had nothing else to do'. This is something the young understand well.

--- Pope Francis. Audience with the participants in the Congress promoted by the national Office for the Pastoral Care of Vocations of the Italian Episcopal Conference (Rome, 3-5 January 2017), 05.01.2017
<https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2017/01/05/170105a.html>

I think that an important realization that helps us live listening as a condition is **knowing that we are already inhabited** – the space the other occupiers within me has already been given to me, and it is a gift... True encounters will allow me to attribute it a name and to enlarge my heart ever more according to the physical reality (history, character, desires, etc.). These two elements depend upon each other: we will not be able to listen if we have not already created a space within us to give to the other person, nor can we listen if we do not know the other through the sharing of true stories and experiences.

2. Listening as a GAZE

Listening happens with our eyes - through what we look at and how we look. We know well that nonverbal communication is much stronger, more spontaneous, and more eloquent than the words we say and hear. God listens with His eyes. His gaze delves deep into our hearts and He reads what is there, inside, but it is not an "investigative" gaze that seeks out our failures or weak point: it is a gaze that loves and that makes Him happy recognizing our heart is His Home.

One of the most beautiful, strongest, and most convincing experiences that I am having in this area of Torino is praying the rosary as I walk the streets: Porta Palazzo, the area of Corso Principe Oddone, and the "Balòn". [translator's note: one region of Torino's northern section, the city's industrial area, where a system of canals connecting to the Dora River offered the necessary water power. These sectors, from

west to east, were Martinetto, Valdocco, Borgo Dora, Pallone (or Balòn), and Vanchiglia. Between 1830 and 1850 zoning laws required all industrial operations to relocate to these areas; they had been scattered throughout the city, including the residential city center. (St. John Bosco. *Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales*. Translated by Daniel Lyons, SDB. New Rochelle: Salesiana Publishers, 1989. Notes, ch. 28.) This land has remained, as it was in Don Bosco's time, a land of immigrants, of poverty, and of degradation. Listening to the needs, the diffidence and skepticism, and the fear, but also the superficiality and the estrangement of these young people helps shake me out of a sterile peace and tranquility. I go to sleep saying: "Your people cry out and suffer, Lord, and what do I do about it?" I realize that just knowing this intellectually is not enough to make me question myself – I need to see and to intercept the gaze of these young people to feel they are part of me.

Listening with one's eyes means not getting lost in any one particular about you: your face, your expressions, how you move or dress, how you see, etc., and to try to read what you are from the clues on your face. Faces carry clues to our being in their beauty and their complexity. Every face is to be contemplated!

"Not only does the love of God have attention for its substance; the love of our neighbor which we know to be the same love, is made of this same substance. This way of looking is first of all attentive. The soul empties itself of all its own contents in order to receive into itself the being it is looking at, just as he is, in all his truth."

--- Simone Weil. "Reflections on the Right Use of School Studies with a View to the Love of God" in *Waiting for God*, New York City: GP Putnam's Sons, 1951.

<https://theologyforum.wordpress.com/2012/03/09/simone-weil-on-study-prayer-more-thoughts-on-theological-education-and-attention>

The face is the form [essence] of the Beloved, the goal of our seeking, and the encounter that happens: "*My heart has said to you: My face has sought you: Your face, O Lord, will I still seek. Turn not away Your face from me*". (Ps. 27:8) In every face, there is the Truth that we seek:

For Don Bosco also, the gaze is a powerful educational tool because he himself grew up under a good gaze: that of Mamma Margaret, of Don Calosso, and of Don Cafasso. He himself says this about his encounter with Don Calosso, in these words:

"[These bold words] impressed the holy priest. He never took his eyes off me while I was speaking."

--- St. John Bosco. *Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales*. Translated by Daniel Lyons, SDB. New Rochelle: Salesiana Publishers, 2007. 43.)

"Don Calosso never took his gaze from John." Here we are dealing with a rather weighty detail, that of the reality of the gaze; in fact, it is one of the most important and decisive phenomenological experiences in a relationship because it speaks of the intentional use of one's freedom, and of the interest of the one who gazes upon the object-subject that raises up wonder and awe. Many times in the *Memoirs of the Oratory of St. Francis de Sales*, Don Bosco entrusts to the power of the gaze the communication of the importance of an encounter, of an event, or of a mission. We know very well how the first generations of his students from the Oratory have testified to the almost supernatural attractive force of his gaze, of Don Bosco's eyes.

'One day – continued Roda – during recreation, a bad word escaped from my lips; I clapped my hand over my mouth, but it had already escaped. My companions heard it. Dominic approached me and said: 'Have you forgotten our resolutions not to use bad language? Go immediately to Don Bosco and tell him the whole story of this unfortunate thing that happened. He is so very good;

you'll see – he will fix everything. In the meantime, I will pray for you.' I did not hesitate; I went straightaway. But where could I find Don Bosco? He was in the parlor surrounded by some gentlemen. Just like a rude fellow, I broke right into the midst of them. Surprised, Don Bosco said: 'See, I am very busy at the moment, would you be able to wait a minute?' Those men thought that I had an urgent commission and withdrew to one side. Then I stood on tippy toes and spoke into our good father's ear: 'Savio has sent me to you; I said a blasphemy.' I was trembling like a leaf. Don Bosco did not yell at me, but I saw a deep suffering wash over his face! I understood the gravity of my sin. Those eyes pierced my heart. 'Don't do that anymore, dear son; never again – it is an offense against God, you know! The Lord would not bless us. Go to church and recite the Our Father many times.' I ran to the altar, prayed the Our Fathers, and ran out, lightened as if someone had taken a huge weight off my chest. I don't remember how many Our Fathers I said, but Don Bosco's gaze? Never will I forget that!

Every one of Don Bosco's boys felt that he was looked upon and loved in the depths of his being. Is this not, perhaps, the root of every vocation - being recognized, seen, loved, wanted, and supported in all the good that one's heart guards secretly?

--- Stefano Mazzer, SDB. "Tu non hai più padre" in *Sapientiam Dedit Illi: Studi su don Bosco e sul carisma salesiano* by Andrea Bozzolo, SDB, LAS, 2015. <http://www.omniabuk.com/scheda-ebook/bozzolo-andrea/sapientiam-dedit-illi-9788821310621-318971.html>

With his measured, calm, and serene gaze he captivated others with an irresistible attraction. With the same power, when he wished, he made himself understood. Often, through an action or a smile, accompanied by a fixed gaze, a question, a response, an invitation, or an entire discussion was had. So many times Don Bosco looked at a young person in such a particular way that his eyes spoke even while his lips said nothing in that moment and still he made them understand what he wanted of the boy. The good young lad would answer him with his lips, amazed that he had perfectly understood the thoughts in Don Bosco's mind. Sometimes it dealt with things that had no connection with what had been said before, or that had been seen, or that had happened just then. It was a question that did not regard personally the one in question: a command, some advice, or a counsel concerning school or recreation or something else was perfectly understood. Often he would follow a boy with his gaze wherever the boy went in the courtyard or portico while he was conversing tranquilly with others. But all of a sudden, the gaze of that boy would meet Don Bosco's and, reading in those limpid eyes the desire to speak with him, he would come and ask what Don Bosco wanted of him. Don Bosco would tell him in his ear. Not rarely, while he had many students in front of him, Don Bosco would fix his gaze on one or two, making with his hand almost a visor over his eyes - just as one does who was looking into the light and wants to see better - and seem to penetrate into the depths of their hearts. They remained confused, and the word on their lips died, and they felt within themselves that he knew some secret of theirs. In fact, he did read on their face some shadow of sin or remorse. Just the slightest movement of his head was then enough: there was no longer any need for an

invitation - all that remained was to establish the moment for Confession.
(*Biographical Memoirs*. vol. VI. 234-235.)

The depth of Don Bosco's gaze derived from his interiority, a fruit of Grace and of nature, and from looking around him, before him, and on high. He knew each of his boys individually and so well that, reading their souls, he knew how to give to each one the advice, the admonishment, or the comfort he needed. This understanding that was communicated by his attentive and fatherly gaze made the young approach him, listen to him, and open their hearts completely to him.

Through the "parolina all'orecchio" [little word in the ear], Don Bosco bent over and spoke to him in secret, with his hand cupping his mouth lest anyone hear. (*Biographical Memoirs*. vol. VI. 234.) Listening became encounter and word, timely and personal, opening the hearts of the young to confidence.

3. Listening as SILENCE

Silence is necessary for listening. True communication demands silence for only he who forgets himself can open himself up to another. A silence, therefore, that is not absence, such as a void, or non-participation, but one that is poverty of self and God's space.

Authentic silence, therefore, calls for a "decentralization." To "de-centralize oneself" means to make room for others, recognizing that they are a gift – without bias, forgetting oneself and one's desire to shine or be in the spotlight, one's egocentricity, and narcissism. There is a death to self that is mandatory if one is to give a worthy welcome; there is an expropriation of oneself to allow the other to be heard and understood, just as they are, and thus able to perceive concretely that they are loved by God. Christ "*emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men.*" (Philippians 2:7). He emptied himself to take on humanity, Man, in the totality of his beauty and of his sin.

"One listens with effectiveness only when one silences himself within, taking true interest in the other, trying to understand the meaning of his words. This happens when we put our intrapsychic dialogues - those which demand the rights of citizenship within us - in parentheses and when we put aside our tendency to respond to everything, wanting to offer solutions."

— J.C. Bermejo, *L'ascolto che sana*

In order to understand another, one must enter into his universe, know how to see through his eyes, feel what he feels, be him by means of interpenetration and closeness. One must momentarily abandon his own biases, personal inclinations, *a priori* ideas, and familiar territory. All these things, in fact, render our attention selective, filtering what comes to us from the other and refashioning it in keeping with the image that we have of him. [We must] Leave aside every concern for self-affirmation, curiosity, or criticism.

--- Citation in *Un certosino*, "Il cammino della vera felicità. Le beatitudini fondamento della pace interiore". Milano: Paoline, 2005.

To live silence so as to make myself attentive is the proof that my listening is not being done for my benefit... (for self-gain, to satisfy my curiosity, or to receive affirmation...), but is for the exclusive good of the other. I am the one who decides to love the other, to offer myself to him, forgetting myself so that he may feel reborn in me and from this, my way of receiving him, he might perceive at least a little bit how dear he is to God's heart, too!

4. Listening as TRUST and WAITING

The need to say "I don't know" while or after having finished listening to some young people and to live this "not knowing" not as a problem but as a resource have happened to me many times – and also to say, "I am burdened and tired" and to live this condition as the consequence of a great investment and not as a morally-mistaken feeling.

This "not knowing" has permitted me to be free and to try to open myself to the Holy Spirit, who gives Himself with strength and abundance to one who is truly seeking. It has also allowed me to live my being burdened as a handing over of my poverty and to come to know that whether I am a useful or a useless instrument depends upon God's will.

I believe that the outcome of authentic listening is trust and waiting – the desire to walk together with the other and both considering each other the place in which God can express His Will. Recounting our stories to each other with liberty and learning to call things by their name, permits life to be read with greater understanding. This requires time and patience, true interest, a profound love, and truly taking on the one who stands before me.

The rush to arrive at the "*dunque*" [the “therefore”], or to arrive at a resolution to problems, or to speak "illuminating" words – all realities which grab us at times and do not allow us to focus on the other person for what he or she is – turns out to be a sterile behavior which inflates our ego but does nothing to render us docile in the Hands of the Father.

“I am interested in you; what you think and what you have to say interests me.” This is Pope Francis’ attitude concerning every young person – no exceptions – and it is the desire of a Church that is Alive! The Synod on the Young puts us in this mode, which is not simply a tool for obtaining results or answers but a way of life. This type of synod process that Pope Francis is asking of us presupposes interest, attention, listening, and humility. Everyone has something important to say and all of us have the duty to listen and to learn, even the Holy Father.

I listen, before anything else. “A synodal Church is a Church which listens, which realizes that listening ‘is more than simply hearing’. (Pope Francis. Address. Oct. 17, 2015.) It is a mutual listening in which everyone has something to learn.” These words recall to mind the “attitudes of brothers in the Lord” as Francis requested of the Fathers gathered for the opening of the 2014 Synod: “speaking with *parrhesia* [freedom and boldness] and listening with humility”. (“Greeting of Pope Francis to the Synod Fathers during the First General Congregation of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops”. Oct. 6, 2014.) Opening oneself up to listening is a both a choice of method and of field. Listening, in fact, is the source of true relationships, always new and different. In these relationships, which become an encounter with another, an authentic dialogue develops, which is light, free, and not bogged down by words that speak only of one’s own *ego*. Listening means being available and ready; it is an enrichment that is reciprocal and a relating... Moreover, this is true, in a particular way, at the ecclesial level. I listen as a humble person with the desire to go beyond the surface, to dig deep into

myself, so as to put the present moment into communication with Eternity, the fragment with the whole, and the provisory with the Definitive.

5. Listening as ACCOMPANIMENT

I have tried to point out every nuance and angle of the act of listening – condition, gaze, silence, trust, and waiting – all of which flow together within this dynamic of accompaniment. When thinking about listening, my mind goes continually to different encounters with the young and, in particular, to those which I have had personally while sitting in my office or walking in the courtyards of Valdocco.

The young explicitly ask us to be reference points and “spaces” of listening and of presence within the dynamic of accompaniment.

"Do I wish to understand how to go about things and how to love truly?"

"What priorities and order do I give to my life?"

"I want to believe but my highs and lows knock me off balance."

"I want to fulfill my responsibilities with conscientiousness and courage without allowing myself to be squashed by the struggles."

"I seriously want to try living as a Christian; that is, according to Christ, every day of my life."

"I want to live a life of service not because it fulfills me but so that I may be useful and do some Good."

"I want to live my friendships and relationships with responsibility and freedom."

"I want to allow myself to love, but I struggle very much."

"Do I want to know what my place is?"

"I want to do what God wants of me."

"I understand that there are parts of me that are "out of order" and I need someone to help me understand them and tell me the truth."

"I want..."

These are the questions and the profound desires which I want to express; these are the questions which mark the turning point of a listening that is paying attention to things to one that is of the heart. These are the questions to which I must continually respond with my life, every day, and not for the purpose of being “credible,” but so as to be happy and to walk ever more according to the Meaning of my existence.

Much time and patience are required to reach this point: the time to tell the story of one’s reality and the patience to live in the knowledge of the other (which is the sum total of his/her entire existence: family, education, school, the times they fell in love, work, faith, encounters, wounds, passions, relationships, struggles, experiences, and desires); and the patience necessary for and the beauty of seeking God in all this and to do His Will.

Listening is the condition necessary to be able to walk with the young, but two more fundamental steps must follow this one: decision and action. A listening that digs deep into truth bears with it the essential question of life: its meaning! The decision is prompted and sustained by the promise present in the eyes of the one who is listening – the promise that authentic happiness is possible. If the young whom we encounter discover in our eyes the Beauty of a Life that is given for others, then they will live the courage and enthusiasm needed to make their own good decisions. I am certain of it!

Three words sum up Mary's attitude: listening, decision, action. They are words that point out a way for us too as we face what the Lord asks of us in life. Listening, decision, action.

1. Listening. What gave rise to Mary's act of going to visit her relative Elizabeth? A word of God's Angel. "Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son..." (Lk 1:36). Mary knew how to listen to God. Be careful: it was not merely "hearing", a superficial word, but it was "listening", that consists of attention, acceptance and availability to God. It was not in the distracted way with which we sometimes face the Lord or others: we hear their words, but we do not really listen. Mary is attentive to God. She listens to God.

However Mary also listens to the events, that is, she interprets the events of her life, she is attentive to reality itself and does not stop on the surface but goes to the depths to grasp its meaning. Her kinswoman Elizabeth, who is already elderly, is expecting a child: this is the event. But Mary is attentive to the meaning. She can understand it: "with God nothing will be impossible" (Lk 1:37).

This is also true in our life: listening to God who speaks to us, and listening also to daily reality,

paying attention to people, to events, because the Lord is at the door of our life and knocks in many ways, he puts signs on our path; he gives us the ability to see them. Mary is the mother of listening, of attentive listening to God and of equally attentive listening to the events of life.

2. The second word: decision. Mary did not live "with haste", with breathlessness, but, as St Luke emphasizes, she "kept all these things, pondering them in her heart" (cf. Lk 2:19, 51). Moreover, at the crucial moment of the Angel's Annunciation, she also asks: "how shall this be?" (Lk 1:34). Yet she does not stop at the moment of reflection either. She goes a step further: she decides. She does not live in haste but "goes with haste" only when necessary. Mary does not let herself be dragged along by events; she does not avoid the effort of taking a decision. And this happens both in the fundamental decision that was to change her life: "I am the handmaid of the Lord..." (cf. Lk 1:38), and in her daily decisions, routine but also full of meaning. The episode of the wedding of Cana springs to my mind (cf. Jn 2:1-11): here too one sees the realism, humanity and practicality of Mary who is attentive to events, to problems.

She sees and understands the difficulty of the young married couple at whose wedding feast the wine runs out; she thinks about it, she knows that Jesus can do something and decides to address her Son so that he may intervene: "they have no more wine" (cf. v. 3). She decides.

It is difficult in life to take decisions. We often tend to put them off, to let others decide instead, we frequently prefer to let ourselves be dragged along by events, to follow the current fashion; at times we know what we ought to do, but we do not have the courage to do it or it seems to us too difficult because it means swimming against the tide. In the Annunciation, in the Visitation and at the wedding of Cana Mary goes against the tide. Mary goes against the tide; she listens to God, she reflects and seeks to understand reality and decides to entrust herself totally to God. Although she is with child, she decides to visit her elderly

relative and she decides to entrust herself to her Son with insistence so as to preserve the joy of the wedding feast.

3. The third word: action. Mary set out on a journey and “went with haste” (cf. Lk 1:39). Last Sunday I underlined Mary’s way of acting: in spite of the difficulties, the criticism she would have met with because of her decision to go, nothing could stop her. And here she leaves “with haste”. In prayer, before God who speaks, in thinking and meditating on the facts of her life, Mary is not in a hurry, she does not let herself be swept away by the moment, she does not let herself be dragged along by events. However, when she has clearly understood what God is asking of

her, what she has to do, she does not loiter, she does not delay, but goes “with haste”. St Ambrose commented: “There is nothing slow about the Holy Spirit” (Expos. Evang. sec. Lucam, II, 19: PL 15, 1560). Mary’s action was a consequence of her obedience to the Angel’s words but was combined with charity: she went to Elizabeth to make herself useful; and in going out of her home, of herself, for love, she takes with her the most precious thing she has: Jesus. She takes her Son.

We likewise sometimes stop at listening, at thinking about what we must do, we may even be clear about the decision we have to make, but we do not move on to action. And above all we do not put ourselves at stake by moving towards others “with haste” so as to bring them our help, our understanding, our love; to bring them, like Mary, the most precious thing we have received, Jesus and his Gospel, with words and above all with the tangible witness of what we do.

--- Pope Francis. Address. May 31, 2013.

Pope Francis reminds us of the importance of “putting ourselves out there” for accompaniment requires being available and ready to take on the other; i.e., to be willing to “allow ourselves to be touched” by his or her life experience. An “antiseptic” accompaniment, in which we keep our distance, has no reason to be. Only if another’s life is taken on can it be redeemed for thus Christ did for each one of us - He, the Lamb immolated for our salvation. We too are called to this!

Mary, woman of listening, open our ears; grant us to know how to listen to the word of your Son Jesus among the thousands of words of this world; grant that we may listen to the reality in which we live, to every person we encounter, especially those who are poor, in need, in hardship.

Mary, woman of decision, illuminate our mind and our heart, so that we may obey, unhesitating, the word of your Son Jesus; give us the courage to decide, not to let ourselves be dragged along, letting others direct our life.

Mary, woman of action, obtain that our hands and feet move “with haste” toward others, to bring them the charity and love of your Son Jesus, to bring the light of the Gospel to the world, as you did. Amen.

--- Pope Francis, Prayer to Mary, the Woman of Listening, May 2013.

