



## FAITH AS LISTENING

**A**ddressing the Christians of Rome, Paul of Tarsus states emphatically that “faith comes from hearing and that means hearing the word of Christ” (Rm. 10:17).

It is obvious to everyone that our digital age gives primacy to the eye, to sight, to a rapid succession of images, rather than to what we hear. In contrast to this, the Bible accentuates a slow and attentive listening to the Word: “Listen, Israel...” (Dt. 6:4).

In the aforementioned Pauline text, three elements can be identified as contributing to the growth of the community’s faith: the person who speaks, the one who listens, and God’s saving Word. It is through this interlocking channel that the water of faith runs.

To “connect” with the Word, it is essential to come in contact with a witness who has already made the journey of faith. The fact that such a witness is necessary (cf. 1 Jn. 1:1-4) reveals both a profound anthropological truth and a fundamental theological one.

The anthropological truth is that human beings grow and develop only in an environment of listening. A person is by definition a creature created for dialogue, for interaction with others. He/she is the subject of relationships, and those relationships are ordered to communion.

Today, unfortunately, no one teaches the important truth that the gift of listening is an exquisite act of love. Many people believe that it is more important to speak than to listen. And yet I become who I am through you. My identity is formed by listening to God and others, and it remains clear and vibrant only through fruitful relationships.

The theological truth referred to above springs spontaneously from this anthropological reality first of all because God himself is the Living Word. In the Hebrew way of thinking, the Word is manifested not only as Divine Revelation but also as the power that calls all things into being, into relationship. God, the people we meet, history and our very life need silence and profound listening if they are to progressively reveal themselves. Only the Word proclaimed by a credible witness and welcomed with an open heart can call faith into being. To believe is to enter into communion with God through the Word. It is the fruit of the Father’s call, the Son’s revelation and the Spirit’s illumination.

The believer listens to the Word of Christ and that listening leads to faith. The true vocation of a Christian is to listen to Jesus: “This is my Son, the Chosen one. Listen to him” (Lk. 9:35). But not only is it important to listen to Jesus; it is also essential to allow the Spirit to teach us how to do this.

The listening of Jesus was a profound participation in the sufferings and hopes of humanity. His listening reached its culmination on the cross, where it was transformed into obedience to the Father and total self-offering for the life of the world (cf. Phil. 2:5-11). For Christ, listening meant accepting people and offering them what he “heard” from the Father, namely: the love that frees and saves, comforts and strengthens.

For the Church of every era, listening to Jesus is an indispensable criterion for interpreting events and situations in the light of faith in the midst of the inevitable difficulties of our constantly-changing history.