

listening

# vita più

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Listening to Bakhita.  
Our Universal Sister

LISTENING TO HIMSELF  
Listening is the way  
of discernment

LISTENING TO THE OTHER  
The discovery of the other



FIGLIE DELLA  
CARITÀ  
CANOSSIANE

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# vita più

Dear friends

The time into which we are moving - which we hope will be less and less a time of pandemic - opens us to unprecedented and epochal challenges, such as inequalities, climate crises, artificial intelligence, while the prospect of a “post-human” era appears. How can we live this time? It is urgent that we rediscover the fundamentals of human life, a discovery that is always called to renew itself, always called to be open to newness, to the good news. This is why in the journey of “Vita Più” this year wants to deepen, above all, two great fundamentals of human and Christian life: listening and giving.

Two human dynamics, deeply biblical and decisive for personal and community life, which offer privileged points of view for interpreting this time and living it intensely. It is like the double breath that inserts us into life: inhale and exhale, listen and give. We want to deepen both of them as we move towards the General Chapter of the Institute.

Let's start, in this issue, with listening.

On our journey we can always rediscover within man those resources that allow us to live our time “from within”. It is

that voice that calls man to move towards himself. Towards an interiority that we discover to be inhabited by many voices: but how can we distinguish and recognize that voice which speaks to me of life? Here the Christian tradition offers us a precious treasure: the discernment of spirits.

But listening is always, necessarily, listening to the other person, taking the first step in an encounter, in the discovery of the other person. Like Jesus, who knows how to enter into profound empathy with the people he meets: be it the Samaritan woman or Lazarus' family, as can be rediscovered in the Lectio contained in this issue. It is a very rich issue that includes testimonies from the Canossian world, testimonies of listening to oneself and to the other, from the most diverse ministries: formation, accompanying young people, assisting the sick, community life. In the background, a charismatic reinterpretation of the figure of Bakhita as a woman of listening.

May you have a profitable reading, dear readers, and a good ear!

*Paolo Bovio*



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## VITA PIÙ

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# It is lovely to start a new year by wishing each other "PEACE!".

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**E**very beginning is full of expectations, of possibilities; we can choose whether to live by repeating the same old ways of doing things or to listen to the world and respond with small or large actions to promote peace. These actions come from within our hearts and are shown by the expression of our face, in welcoming others with sympathy and saying with our lives that peace is manifested even in small gestures.

We tend to think that peace and peace agreements are made at high levels. This may be so but is also true that all true peace always begins in the heart of every man and woman on earth. I have always been enthusiastic about the possibility of “beginning” or “starting again”, a possibility that we all have. It is like being reborn, it is giving our small or great contribution to the world and being women and men of peace for all.

Maddalena di Canossa, our Foundress, was a woman of peace, she “fought” all her life to give a foundation of peace to a society torn by war. Magdalene responded to the Lord’s call and was a bearer of peace. A woman of profound spirituality, enterprising, endowed with clarity and farsightedness, she felt the urgent need to concretize the project she had

in her heart by involving young women who, like her, wished to consecrate themselves to the Lord. She shared her idea of the future, her hopes, her projects, and her goals to give the poor their rightful dignity, with both poor and rich laypeople.

She collaborated with everyone in a shared effort to break the mold of a society that feared any kind of change and looked with suspicion at her commitment to the promotion that freed young women from the many slaveries to which they were subjected.

Magdalene did not stop, she was not afraid, but supported by a deep faith and absolute trust in Our Blessed Mother Mary, with courage and creativity, she realized her ideal together with all those who collaborated with her and who had accepted her invitation to work together. In this way, she helped to bring tiny “shoots of peace” to the world. She has shown us how an ideal, welcomed, and shared, can transform humanity.

These are the roots of our Family, and, like Magdalene, we continue to contribute to building true fraternity in the world.

To all of you who belong to the Canossian family, to our collaborators, to friends, and all your families, I wish you to live in peace of heart and to be bearers of peace.

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*M. Annamaria Babbini*  
*Superior General*



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# OPEN SPACE-IN DIALOGUE WITH YOU

## Answering our readers' questions

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### What is the Synod?

The word “Synod” comes from Greek and means “walking together”.

A synod is a journey of reflection, listening sharing and dreaming for the future and it will last for several years. Its aim is to renew our way of being Church.

### Why do we have a Synod?

4 In order to rethink about the Church of the future the Synod gives everyone a chance to speak and to give their own contribution, because only by listening to everyone can we make meaningful choices. The pandemic we are all experiencing is a propitious time for real listening because it has completely unhinged everything we have been used to.

### How will the Synod work? How long will it last?

Here are the steps of the Synod:

2021- 2022 bottom-up consultation

2023-2024 “wisdom” phase

2025 national assembly

2026 return to the dioceses

### And what does this have to do with me?

To respond to the invitation, you can participate in the dialogues which are being organized in your parish and in your local area. These groups are spaces where you can share your experiences. This will help all of us to understand the time in which we live and to recognize the signs it holds which, like buds, hold promise for the future.





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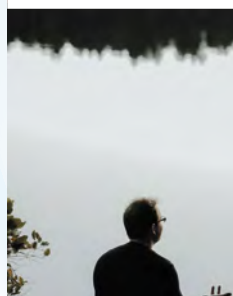
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# Listening to Bakhita. Our Universal Sister

## The life of “Mother Moretta” speaks to us and gives us a message for today

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I believe that one of the greatest riches of our Church is the great variety of its saints. Some types of holiness are totally unique, almost unheard of and astonishing. They do not conform to any fixed rule or pattern, either because they are too “normal” or because they appear to be too “poor”. Rather like what was said about Jesus himself: “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” And yet Bakhita belongs to this last “family” of Saints: a tiny mystery within the great Mystery of the Love of God. She was beatified by Pope John Paul the 2<sup>nd</sup> on May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1992, and it was he who called her “our Universal Sister”. She was then proclaimed a saint on October 1<sup>st</sup>. 2000, a gift of everyone and for everyone!

Her story is absolutely unique. She was sold, illtreated, denied her identity and dignity as a woman. She was reduced to nothing. Even the name she bears is not her own name. It was given to her by her kidnappers who called her Bakhita which means “fortunate one”. But it is exactly this “nothingness” on which the Almighty set his gaze. This logic is nothing new in the history of salvation. God is attracted to that which the world does not value. The God who created all things from nothing begins every one of his works with nothingness. He manifests the totality of his love only to those who accept and live their own nothingness.

Bakhita leads us slowly and gradually to reenter into the depths of our real selves and there listen to what the beauty and simplicity of her life can tell us. She is close to us and is a like a luminous beacon which gives light to those who turn to her.

**But who is Bakhita for us Canossians?**

Bakhita is the woman of amazement, of the sense of wonder of the little ones of the Gospel, and of those who have a pure gaze on the lives of others, capable of grasping the good, of showing with every smallest daily gesture that God never abandons us.

Bakhita is the simple and universal Sister who knew how to find the way of love and freedom through forgiveness and gratitude to God.

Among the many expressions to explain who Bakhita is for us Canossians, I choose one contained in the metaphorical expression: *Bakhita is for us a pearl of rare value!* Yes, Bakhita’s life is a precious pearl offered to our Canossian family and to the whole of humanity.

Let’s think for a moment about how a pearl is formed, one of those pearls that perhaps we have admired on someone wearing a valuable necklace. Each pearl is the result of an oyster wounded by a grain of sand that, having entered it, over time becomes a wonderful pearl.

An oyster that has not been injured does not produce its own pearl.

Certainly, Bakhita’s life was marked by many deep wounds. She suffered a lot, but she did not concentrate on her pain. She knew how to see the hand of God in her pain, the God who wanted her for his own forever.





"My whole life was God's gift, men were his instruments and thanks to them I had the gift of faith". Her wounds became like those of Jesus: luminous because they were transformed by the Love that forgives.

Because of her faith, Bakhita accepted pain with the precious pearl of forgiveness, the fruit of a reconciled memory, of the sense of the providence and the fruitfulness of the cross.

When anyone asked her what she would do if she were to meet those who kidnapped her and treated her so cruelly, she replied: "I would kneel down to kiss their hands, because, if this had not happened, I would not be a Christian and a religious now."

**Three messages that Bakhita gives us through telling the story of her life.**

**God loves us and never abandons us**

Bakhita recognizes that the God she came to know when she became a Christian is the same God who loved her even before she could know him: "I remembered how, seeing the sun, the moon and the stars and the beauty of nature, I said to myself: *'Who can possibly be the master of these beautiful things? And I felt a great desire to know him.'*" Bakhita places every memory of her life within the great memory of God's love: "The Lord has loved me so much!"

**God is good and provident**

Bakhita rereads the moments of her life of slavery, moments that brought her close to death and she sees them as moments in which God's liberating action became particularly intense in her life: "*Now more and more I know the goodness of the Lord who saved me even then in an almost miraculous way ... I can honestly really say that I did not die because of a miracle of the Lord who destined*

*me for better things*". She recognizes that the Lord prevented her from falling into a state of despair: "*As a slave I never despaired, because I felt within me a mysterious force that sustained me.*"

**God takes care of everyone and everything. He is "El Paron" the Lord!**

Bakhita understands that the Lord God does not discriminate against anyone, he is the God who chose her, wanted her just as she was, the little "Moretta"! "*Those who hear my story say: you poor thing, you poor thing! I am not a poor thing, because I belong to the Master, and I am in his house. Those who do not belong completely to the Lord are the poor ones.*" "El Paron", is not merely an expression in the Venetian dialect, but indicates the Lordship of God in her life, the Only One who truly held her in his hands.

The experience of Baptism and of the religious vocation, her simple and profound faith are the source reference of her life, the pearl of her holy life, the pearl of a heart totally transformed and made capable of loving everyone immensely. This is what Bakhita continues to tell all of us, everywhere all over the world.

To us Canossians, who are happy and honored to be her family, she gives the gift and obligation to bear witness to the charism of the greatest Love, to live in the world with a heart that loves freely, keeping our gaze fixed on Jesus Crucified and being contemplatives in action, anchores, and apostles. This style of life can be expressed in many ways. The nucleus does not change. It is to contemplate the greatest Love that Jesus lives and gives from the Cross and to witness to it everywhere because within that Crucified Love there is room for everyone. No one is excluded: there is room for the Marchioness, St. Magdalene of Canossa, our Mother Foundress, and there is room for the slave, St. Josephine Bakhita, Universal Sister! Yes, there is room for everyone, even for you who "listen".





# LISTENING TO HIMSELF

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“**L**isten to yourself and in  
that quietude, you might  
hear the voice of God.”

[Maya Angelou]

# A woman (with too many husbands), a wayfarer (with too many questions)

...and in the middle a well (with some mystery), and water that quenches thirst forever



**Amedeo Cencini,**  
Canossian priest,  
psychotherapist  
and formator

**I**t is unusual to read the story of Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well from the point of view of *listening*. It is, in fact, a passage, rich in words, without pauses, like a deep dialogue between two people who do not know each other, but between whom there seems to be an immediate connection, understanding, openness, and gradually growing acceptance and mutual trust.

All this is possible because the two speakers simply listen to each other. I, therefore, propose five scenes of the famous episode recounted by John (4:1-30). This is not a commentary, just some food for thought, and I have taken some liberties with the order of succession of the verses.

## **1. "Jesus, tired of the journey, sat by the well... A woman from Samaria came to draw water."**

In the dry and perpetually thirsty Palestine of the day the wells were a real blessing. They were a symbol of life, a condition for being able to live, and Jesus chose to sit right by a well. He knows that sooner or later someone will come there to look for "water", or for that sense or that happiness that will give them the will to live. But what is even more surprising about this verse is that even Jesus is seeking something and is tired of this seeking, "tired of the journey." God also gets tired. His tiredness comes

from his endless traveling in search of man, in search of me. He is tired, not because he cannot go on, nor because he is tempted to give up. On the contrary, his tiredness is the loneliness of the lover; it is the yearning of not being understood in his loving passion; it is the restlessness of God's heart until it rests in the heart of man. May we know how to "listen" to this weariness of God!

## **2. "Give me a drink"**

The paradox of this singular encounter continues because it is Jesus who thirsts and has thirsted for much longer than the woman, and his thirst is far stronger than hers. The Lord's thirst is not merely for water but for everything that comes out of the true heart of man. He will say it himself shortly after: he thirsts to be worshiped "in spirit and in truth." Only this can quench God's eternal thirst.

God thirsts for us to thirst for him, to desire him because his joy is to fulfill this desire of ours. When I whisper his name or invoke him, when I cry out my thirst to him or seek him from love to love, from well to well, it is he who has put this cry in my heart, like water that eases his thirst.

It is as if God has put something of himself and his life in my hands, or made his joy depend on me. I, a Samaritan woman with a wandering heart, so often attracted by wrong wells, am God's risk and jealousy, his restlessness, and his rest.

## **3. "He who drinks of this water will still thirst, but he who drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst again"**

What power for truth in these words! At least for those who have the honesty to lis-



ten to their heart, to admit that every time they have tried to satisfy their deep hunger simply by responding to the basic needs of life (and all these are listed in the passage: rest, fatigue, food, thirst, sexuality, religiosity, we could also add, the consecrated life itself, when it consists only of exteriority) they have not reached peace, nor the truth of living. Jesus seems to say to us the same words that were spoken at the well: “Woman of Samaria, do not marry only your needs, which, like your men, are many, because in this way your life will always be unfinished; unmarried, a solitary life. It will be a life that is not consecrated to a great and unique love but a life that is stubbornly guarded for you alone. This life is, therefore, a deluded and disappointed one, a sterile and unsatisfied heart, because the human heart is made for God and is restless until it rests in God, who made this heart greater than all his creatures together.” For this reason, when it seems we are satisfying, God ignites in us a hunger for something other than bread, a thirst for something other than water, and a desire for something much more than human love or physical love...

#### **4 “If you knew the gift of God...”**

So, I ask myself if I have listened to this other desire, which is a gift of God. Do I ask myself if I have ever listened to it within me; if I cultivate it and nourish it? Do I bless it and recognize it as a gift? “If you knew the gift of God!”

To do this we need to have a certain image of God. We need to see him as the one who does not demand, but gives, who does not impose but offers. God does not seek obedient toy soldiers, but happy sons and daughters, and on Sinai, he gives a law precisely to protect the great gift of life and the joy of being

his children. And the great gift of God is not one thing among things, but God himself. The Samaritan woman is offered a well-spring, not just water for her midday thirst. She yearns for this spring and forgets the empty jug on the rim of the well because now she hears a spring rising in her heart. She doesn’t need the jug any longer.

***5. A Spring is something that gushes forth eternally, something that cannot be stopped and or contained, it is water that becomes a wellspring. I will exist only if I am a wellspring, because this is how God, who is Father exists; only as fatherhood, as a source of life, as a gift, the source of all other sources.***

And so, my thirst cannot end in me drinking until my thirst is quenched and my need is satisfied. It must become a fountain for others, a fountain that will quench their thirst and a wellspring for their needs and their raging thirsts. My hunger will not end because of satisfying it with as much bread as I desire but in satisfying the hunger of others, by being a source of compassion, friendship, and companionship. This was how it was with this woman of many loves, whose heart returned to its pure virginal state after this encounter.

And this is where we too, daughters and sons of Magdalene, rediscover the sense of the “most generous” spirit. We discover it when we forget our empty jugs and run to tell others about a tired and thirsty rabbi; a rabbi capable of revealing what is in the human heart, and who tells us of a God who is the God who gives. This rabbi tells us of a God who is in love and can make the song of a wellspring come to life in the desert of our hearts.

This is my wish for this new year, a wish for ourselves and for others: that we may feel the gift and the song of a wellspring which is born in our hands and in our hearts, in each of us and in every one of our Canossian communities!

## Desire, community, journey of discovery

### Listening in the Benedictine spirituality



**I**n the Prologue of his Rule, St Benedict writes: “Listen, son, to the precepts of the Master and bend the ear of your heart”. For the father of western monasticism, listening is not simply to hear, rather, it is the welcoming of a Voice, a Word that is addressed to everyone, it is a deep listening that engages the whole person. Only in this way can a reply be given that becomes obedience to God.

Let us think of Abraham who left his country of Ur. Because he was attuned to the Voice of God, he could overcome what for him would have been impossible to accept. Faced by the changes and failures of his journey, the father of our faith is never defeated because he knows that God has spoken to him. God’s very Voice is the only measure of his departure.

Also the prophet Isaiah says: “Every morning, make my ear attentive that I may listen as the initiated.” Only God’s grace can open the ear of the heart so as to listen to God’s Word. In the monastic life one experiences a great revelation: listening – that often begin from being focused on oneself where everything depends on one’s hearing, on one’s needs – becomes little by little an awareness, an understanding and a welcoming of one’s own weaknesses, limitations and wounds. The monk’s daily life is always accompanied by this listening that becomes a desire to be healed and to continually seek the sense of what one lives. In this way, lis-

tening is a long and never-ending journey of knowledge, always more truthful of oneself, so as to become ever more a free gift for everyone.

For the monks, the first “playing field” for reciprocal service is the community where one practices for an entire life to listen to God and to their brothers (and sisters). In fact, the first service we render one another is exactly that of listening. Bonhoeffer says: “As the love of God begins with the listening of the Word, so the beginning of loving one’s brother (or sister) depends on learning how to listen. It is because of love that God not only speaks to us but also listens to us. Alternatively, it is God’s work if we are able to listen to our brother, (our sister).

Many people of different age and origin knock at our monastery looking for someone that can listen to them. Our service is not to provide answers or solutions to their problems but, rather, to walk beside them and help them to carry the weight of the difficult situations they experience. People feel lighter following a long and patient listening, and protected by those who know how to seriously dedicate some time to them.

However, it can’t be discounted nor is it







easy to listen without being impatient, distracted or convinced to already know what the other is going to say. As the desert fathers teach us, the one who does not know how to listen to his brother (or sister) soon enough will neither be able to listen to God. Because, even before God one will always be full of oneself, one's own words and projects.

Our experience has brought us to understand that, in taking care of others, means adding to the announcing of the Word that of listening. If we don't learn to listen with God's ear, we will neither be able to speak God's Word.



"The bells that ring in every Benedictine monastery are a way of drawing the attention of a community to the day's timetable. But the Benedictine bell towers are not just a reminder of the day's programme. They draw the world's attention to the fragility of the axis around which it revolves. The Benedictine bell towers invite us to listen even when we don't want to.

Years ago, when I was a young nun, we were taught that when the bells rang the hours, we had to stop whatever we were doing and recite the Hours. It was an old rule, which has long since lapsed and no one in the community remembers it in its entirety anymore. But we all know what that meant. It wanted to remind those of us who lived far from the monastery, where our bells did not ring, life's fragility and the demanding presence of God in every moment of our existence.

«Listen», says the Rule.

«Listen», says the bell.

«Listen», says monastic spirituality.

Benedictine spirituality consists in listening, in a culture that looks but very rarely listens. Benedictine spirituality tends to listen to four realities: the Gospels, the Rule, one another and the world around us. "

[from "Listen to Your Heart: Sacred Moments in Everyday Life" by Joan Chittister, O.S.B]

# LISTENING IS THE WAY OF DISCERNMENT

## The testimony of a mother teacher of the Canossian novitiate

“**A**udiam” is the episcopal motto of our new cardinal of the Archdiocese of Manila, Cardinal Jose Advincula who was installed on the Solemnity of the Birth of John the Baptist, June 24, 2021. This motto gives us, his faithful, the certainty of how he desires to fulfill his ministry of shepherding the whole archdiocese with 3.7 million Catholics.

“Audiam”, Cardinal Advincula’s motto continues to amaze me as he exudes simplicity and kindness mirroring to us the merciful heart of the Father, the gentle face of Jesus and the comforting presence of the Spirit the very same qualities expected of us in the accompaniment ministry.

For over a decade in the formation work, I can truly say how the Lord has molded to listen intentionally, actively and reflectively. As a co-discerner, this journey of listening compassionately to the heart of vocation searchers comes to me in a package that is wrapped in layers as if preventing me to see the whole thing in one peek. I unwrap the package slowly yet excitedly to be surprised daily by challenges and unexpected turn of events. The learnings I get astound me continuously revealing to me my person --- my desires and dispositions; both my gifts and weaknesses.

Long before I heard of our Cardinal’s motto Audiam, listening is already one of the skills that the Lord asked me to sharpen so that I can accompany young adults discerning to respond to His invitation to a particular state of life they are called to live freely, generously and wholeheartedly. We know that listening is not easy for it is both a skill and a gift. It requires proficiency and practice and most of all, it requires

silence. Over the years, I have discovered that silence allows us to grow in empathy and compassion, two central elements in listening and two indispensable components in the accompaniment ministry. I together with the discerners will not be able to notice the movements of the Spirit if my inner self is chaotic and if my contemplative stance is in wrecked. Today, the young people and even the not-so-young find it difficult to be silent for the world we live in entertain us with so much clatter affecting our inner self especially our capacity to listen. We seem to be uneasy with silence because we are afraid to encounter our real self, we are anxious by the truth that it is in silence where God reveals to us important things we need to know. It is in silence that God’s heart is exposed and where our real self becomes vulnerable yet truthful.

Two-thirds of my life as a Canossian sister is spent in the formation work and accompaniment ministry and I can say that listening is giving attention. Listening is indeed attending. When we give attention to something or someone we are interested into, it requires the whole of our being. Listening is engaging us --- into a dialogue, into a relationship, into prayer. I am always reminded of how Jesus in His public ministry would engage people into a conversation especially those He does not personally know because He gives time, He dialogues, He reaches out. These are elements I need in listening. When I am preoccupied with something else while talking with someone, I could not engage myself fully and my heart is torn apart realizing that I fail to give myself, I fail to listen, and I fail to be compassionate. And when I also listen to

myself listening with others, I discover my capacity to stretch when the need is greater. I am always awed at the grace I receive at the particular moment when listening is tough yet I can still find myself pulling my strings even longer. Even if this ministry is not always easy, it is in fact, perplexing to say the least, I can listen because I obey to listen: that is when the grace becomes more active than ever.

Accompanying vocationers and formands coming from different familial and ethnical cultures, background and temperaments teach me to be more attentive on the unspoken words and on the spoken words that might have other meaning/s which are far from my own “truths”. Accompanying formands particularly novices coming multicultural contexts while at the same time highlighting the internationality of our Institute and journeying towards interculturality is both life-giving and demanding; both inspiring and onerous yet it leads us to a direction where the Lord desires us to be: listening and companioning. In community living, listening remains one of the most essential unifying elements. With these, I learn to “listen, consider carefully what you hear.”

Listening, I realize through training, experience and the mentoring I received from others, is also an attitude. It is a way of life. Listening is an orientation towards the other making us more other-centered and more compassionate. In this world full of division, fake news, violence and self-centeredness affecting young people’s decisions and behaviors, listening as an attitude is indeed arduous yet we know that this is the way to love, the way of love. Many relationships in our community, apostolate and even in our own family fail because we have not listened well attentively and intentionally to others. Sometimes, our common ground for friendship and acceptance is the way we are

listened to. Young people today express their need to be listened to, to be understood and to be loved.

Lastly, I believe that reflective listening requires action. The fruit of active listening is concretely expressed in actions --- that is, loving others. We know that our Foundress, St. Magdalene of Canossa, is a woman of listening. She listened to the Spirit calling her to respond concretely to God’s merciful love to her which she discovered slowly through the gentle accompaniment of Don Libera, a man who himself listened. Audiam, Magdalene listened to the inspirations and promptings of the Holy Spirit, hence, we are here --- Canossian Daughters of Charity --- spread in different continents who continue to “make Jesus known and loved” in the places where we are sent especially in this time of pandemic where new realities in the mission ask us to “listen more” in order to respond more in love. The two great precepts of charity (love of God and love of neighbors) will never be possible if we will not listen. Audiam, probably from the Hebrew word “Shema”. Many bible scholars are saying that one of the first words that Jesus learned as a child is “shema” since this is what the Jew parents would teach their children the moment they learn how to talk so did Mary and Joseph to Jesus. Audiam, we have witnessed how our Exemplar: Jesus Crucified listened to the Father and acted (obeyed) on what He ordered Him to do: salvation of the whole humanity. This is our insipice!

Audiam, this is the direction where Jesus asks me to take since then until now so that the young and not-so-young people whom God give me to accompany will also learn to listen: to listen to their inner selves, to listen to others and to listen to God. *Audiam.*

# A school that focuses on listening

The class as a community that learns in an atmosphere of well-being and "feeling at ease"



by  
**Susanna De Bianchi**, teacher at the Canossian Professional Formation School in Verona

**T**he Canossian Professional Formation School of Verona has always combined teaching carried out in the classroom with a few days outside the school walls. This ensures that girls and boys strengthen relational dynamics through activities that highlight the ability of negotiation and self-help so that they have

greater awareness of how these are necessary in life. Furthermore, the aim is to make people aware of the values they bear in order to bring improvement/change in their way of being and acting.

In recent years there has been one particular day that focuses on welcoming the other person. This interactive workshop, carried out at the African Museum in Verona, proposed by a lady of Lebanese origin, immediately involves the students emotionally and makes them become aware, through practical activities, of all the possible difficulties and prejudices that people encounter when they leave their country for an unknown and, at times, hostile place.

The students, at the end of the day, demonstrate that they know how to be more reflective and welcoming, but above all, they put themselves, albeit for a short time, "in the shoes of someone who has to face a journey into the unknown". The purpose of these days is to privilege relationships and to support young people in building a solid







individual identity and a full and conscious social self-promotion, especially considering the current life context of adolescents, characterized by excessive and confused external stimuli, by fragmentation of identity references and by widespread proposals for passive adaptation to dominant models.

Implementing interculturality, openness to others and listening in the school, and especially in a Formation School, making use of these strategies means using the heritage of one's own cultural tradition as a starting point, accepting comparison with other stories and narratives by relativizing your own perspectives.

This is perhaps the warmest and most welcoming way to listen. Everyone, in fact, has something to recount ... if someone is willing to listen. Without listening to the other person there is no openness.

The pupil, in education, must become an "actor". Formation is a "movement of reciprocity", it is not enough to talk to the other, nor to talk about the other, but it is necessary to listen to the other.

It is important that the other person also speaks to us, that he manifests himself, that he unveils himself, that he communicates the story of his life. Through the variety of languages and the direct narration of experiences it is possible to create an exchange of cultural values and compare the "points of view" about reality.

The students put their hearts and souls into this because they know they have the trust of those who accompany them on the path of growth and the result is incredible: in a relaxed and informal atmosphere they deal with deep themes, rich in meaning, fully immersed in the personal story of the other.

# *LISTENING TO THE OTHER*

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18





"Too often we underestimate the power of a listening ear, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around."

[Leo Buscaglia]



# LISTENING THAT CALLS

## Jesus and Lazarus: empathy in encounter

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Jesus, true God and true Man, walked the streets of the men and women of his time, welcoming their questions and fears, insecurities and expectations, hopes and disappointments. He led the way with his disciples and with the people, never excluding anyone, always loving all! He revealed a Love that knows how to penetrate one's eyes, listen deeply and offer solutions, always opening new horizons, even in the face of illness and death. *"A certain Lazarus of Bethany was sick and his sisters sent word to him: Lord, your friend is sick."* The Gospel of John in chapter 11 presents the resurrection of Lazarus as the last of the seven "signs" that prepare the definitive sign of Christ's Passover and also the most immediate reason for his death sentence. The protagonist of the story is not Lazarus, but Jesus. All the characters are on the move: Jesus and his disciples from beyond the Jordan to Bethany, the Jews from Jerusalem, Martha from the village, Mary from home and Lazarus from the tomb. And it is at the tomb that all gather together. The narration, together with a teaching method that leads to a new revelation and faith in the Lord Jesus, contains a profound human depth, a force of light and strength, of truth and of a courageous 'moving forward' in the way to listen and to act, a way of 'bringing oneself out'.

### Jesus and the disciples

Jesus is on the other side of the Jordan with his disciples when he receives the news of his sick friend. Lazarus is not just any one, he is the friend not only of the Master but of the whole apostolic group. "Our friend Lazarus ..." Jesus will say speaking of him to the disciples. Jesus loved him, as he loved his sisters, Mary and Martha. The verb to love used in v.5 in Greek is *agapào*, different from the verb *filèin* used before in v.3. *Filèin* indicates the love of friendship, in fact the ones who speak are those who go to bring the news of his illness to Jesus; *agapào* is used when the narrator speaks of Jesus' love for Lazarus and wants to indicate divine love, free, absolute, totally and always available. *"When he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed two days in the place where he was."* Jesus' delay is disconcerting, allowing his friend to die. A mysterious way of behaving and speaking, *"I am happy for you that I had not been there, so that you may believe."* Jesus must contend here with *the misunderstanding of the disciples*, who still see the horizon of death without a future, as the end of every adventure. By involving them in the event, Jesus shows himself attentive to their fears and incredulity, listens to them and answers their questions with other questions, to prepare them to understand what they do not understand now, finally guiding them to take a step forward in faith. The confrontation

between Jesus and his disciples ends with the firm decision of Jesus: "Let us go to him" (Lazarus), followed by the words of Thomas: "Let us





also go to die with him” (Jesus). Even in discipleship, misunderstanding remains.

### **Jesus and Martha**

*“As soon as she knew that Jesus was coming, Martha went to meet him.”* Martha is an active woman who finds the strength to react even in the face of difficult situations. It seems to be her who takes the initiative to leave her village to meet Jesus, but in truth it is He who, coming, sets in motion her steps and her heart. Jesus welcomes her, first of all listening to her subtle reproach, which arises from the natural incomprehension for that delay, *“Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”* But Martha then professes her trust in the power of Jesus’ prayer, *“I know that whatever you ask of God, He will grant it to you.”* It is a sincere faith, but incomplete and nonetheless open. Martha does not yet know that the God of the living and the dead who will raise all on the last day, is here now and is talking to her. She does not yet know that the gift that the Lord is about to give her is greater than any expectation of hers. Guiding her in dialogue, Jesus reveals himself to her as the “Resurrection and Life” and Martha proclaims her faith in him, the Christ, the Son of God who is coming into the world! Shortly after, however, in front of Jesus’ command to remove the stone from his brother’s tomb, doubt and incredulous amazement still emerge, to which the Master replies, *“Didn’t I tell you that, if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”* Greatness and surprise of a God who keeps faith alive in the moment in which everything falters and it seems impossible that what has been believed and proclaimed is true.

### **Jesus and Mary**

Mary, the one who “seated at his feet listened to the word of the Lord” (Lk 10:39), is sitting now in the house, closed in her grief for that loss she felt as irreparable. When Martha secretly tells her, *“The Master is here and is calling you”*, she feels called personally and *“hearing this, she got up quickly and went to him.”* Mary of Bethany immediately leaves the house of mourning and runs to

meet the Lord who loves her and whom she loves. Jesus lives with Mary a very personal relationship that does not need words. Her only words to the Master, the same words of her sister, do not, however, show signs of a faith that can overcome her suffering. And she cries. Her tears are contagious: in fact, the Jews present cry and Jesus himself cries, *“He was deeply moved, he was disturbed ... and burst into tears.”* The Lord so human is moved, he who knows and carries ours pain, he knows the language of tears. It is God’s cry for every child who suffers and dies. But Love goes beyond helpless pain and acts. *“Where have you placed him?”* And he goes to the tomb.

### **Jesus and Lazarus**

Jesus is surrounded by the crowd. Present are the Jews who will decide on his death sentence. To everyone, even to them, before the great sign, here He wants to reveal the Source that makes him live and act. “Jesus looked up and said, *“Father, I thank you for having listened to me. I knew that you always listen to me.”* The Father listens to Jesus just as Jesus himself always listens to the Father. The Son can listen to us and love us in such a human and divine way, with absolute gratuitousness and total fidelity to the point of dying, because he is united to the Father. *“Lazarus, come out!”* It is the cry of Love that is stronger than death, which opens our tombs. This is the glory of Jesus, prophecy and anticipation for all the friends of the Lord, destined for the resurrection. *“Untie him and let him go!”* Jesus’ command to those present is very meaningful: they must let him go, because love never keeps anything for itself but, the more one loves, the more one leaves free the loved one. It is an invitation to the community to free itself from the paralysis of fear and learn to freely give of self. Really listening to Jesus means letting ourselves be conquered by his way of being, also taking on a style that resembles his in our relationships, with the traits of that love that knows how to listen and understand, always opening paths of freedom and hope.

# THE DISCOVERY OF THE OTHER

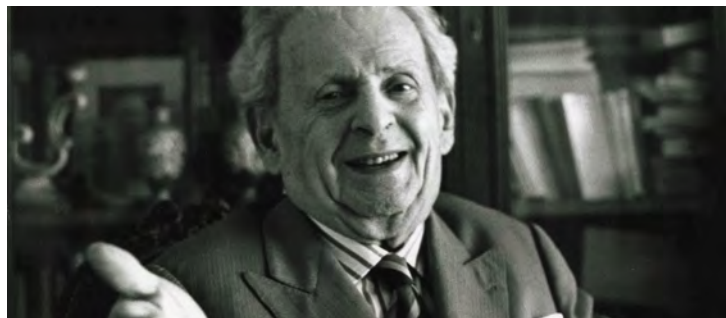
## Alteration and listening in the thought of Emmanuel Lévinas

The new person will only be born from the encounter with the face of the Other. This concept is at the heart of Emmanuel Lévinas' thought, a French philosopher of Lithuanian origin and of Jewish culture. He is a man who, throughout his life, had to firstly confront the darkness of the Nazis' persecutions, and later their disturbing memory. For this reason he has focused his philosophical reflection on ethical questions and of justice research. In the thought of Lévinas – an original

sponse to a call coming from the other. But this centrality of the other requires a relationship of responsibility. The bond with the other becomes real not only when one tries to know them, but when one lives one's responsibility towards them. True responsibility leaves intact the diversity and leads to an adherence of the other in their alteration.

It is, then, about entering into a profound dynamic of listening. In fact, the face of the other speaks to us like a word that becomes a call

to go outside oneself and to open up to the encounter. In the real intimacy of the encounter is revealed the humanity of being, its vulnerability. The meaning of communication is therefore found in this meeting, even before the words, and reveals itself as an opening to the mystery of life. Every



trajectory that sought a meeting point between the Jewish inheritance and the Greek-Latin thought, the two founding traditions of the West – to have the primacy is truly the ethical relationship that is born from encountering difference. According to the French-Lithuanian philosopher, being confronted with another face forces the individual to rethink the fundamentals of one's own culture by passing from the principle of identity to the principle of the altered, from the primacy of the ego to the primacy of the other. It is possible to understand oneself only if one understands the strangeness of the other.

I understand who I am when the other establishes a relationship with me. The basis of my subjectivity is, therefore, ethnicity, relationship. In this way, the ethical rapport becomes the foundation of every acquaintance. The ethical dimension of existence begins from renouncing the completeness of the 'I' and from the re-

encounter, just as every dialogue, is exposed to the risk of misunderstanding. However, it carries within itself a possibility, a condition that there is responsibility. Listening enables us to discover the other as richness (or gift), bringing us to understand the preciousness of the person, unique and real. From this experience of participating in the life of the other, sharing is born.

But the reflection of Lévinas pushes us further. Before the other's face, an opening appears for an inner search, a contemplation of the very mystery of God. The other, the brother/sister who shares with me the condition of being human, is the mark of the Infinite who becomes present in the look of the other. So then, taking care of the other becomes a radical alternative that can make one rediscover the richness, the preciousness of everyone, the urgency of respecting and valuing the other and the rediscovery of new values and of new meanings of existence.

# LISTEN DEEPLY

## Be present to yourself to make room for the Other



by  
**Sr. Anne Tan**

*‘I know you believe that you understood what you think I said BUT I am not sure you realize that what you think you heard is not what I said.’*

This seems to be the phenomena in most of our daily interaction / communication with another. I may be the one not listening rightly, or the one feeling not heard rightly. Why is this so? Listening seems to be such an easy activity, but in reality, it is not so!

Pope Francis, chose ‘LISTEN’ as the theme for 2022 celebration of World Communications Day (statement released Sept. 29 2021). The Pope says: “The pandemic has struck and wounded everyone, and everyone needs to be heard and comforted.”.... his theme is drawn from the Gospel of Luke *“Take care, then, how you listen”*. The Holy Father continues: “Every dialogue, every relationship begins with listening.... for this reason, in order to grow – even professionally – as communicators, we must **relearn** to listen a great deal.”

Simultaneously, at this time, the

Church, the Congregations are all invited to embark on a journey of synodality. Synodality cannot come about without ‘Listening’... and that is for sure! Thus we are all invited, to rediscover listening as essential for good communication.

Unsatisfying communication is rampant in our society today: in relationships between spouses, parents, and children, among neighbors and co-workers, in civic and political life, and between nations, religions, and ethnicities.

What we need is to **relearn** to listen deeply! Interestingly, David Rome and Hope Martin, (teachers in the Shambhala Buddhist tradition) commented that to really listen to others, we must first learn to *listen to ourselves*. How does one listen to oneself? Perhaps, contemplative practices, with their committed cultivation of self-awareness and compassion, may help us in the transformation of our dysfunctional and damaging social habits in communication.

A fruitful place to begin work on shifting our patterns of communication is with the quality of our *listening*. Just as we place the importance of regular exercise for good health, we need to focus, exercise and strengthen our ability as listeners.

**Poor listeners**, underdeveloped listeners, are frequently unable to separate their own needs and interests from those of others. Everything they hear comes with an automatic bias: How does this af-

## Listen deeply

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fect me? What can I say next to get things my way? Poor listeners are more likely to interrupt either they have already jumped to conclusions about what you are saying, or it is just of no interest to them. They attend to the surface of the words rather than listening for what is “between the lines.” When they speak, they are typically in one of two modes. Either they are “downloading”—regurgitating information and pre-formed opinions—or they are in debate mode, waiting for the first sign that you don’t think like them so they can jump in to set you straight.

24 **Good listening**, by contrast, means giving open-minded, genuinely interested attention to others, allowing yourself the time and space to fully absorb what they say. It seeks not just the surface meaning but where the speaker is “coming from”—what purpose, interest, or need is motivating their speech. Good listening encourages others to feel heard and to speak more openly and honestly.

Carl Rogers, the great American psychologist, taught “*active listening*,” a practice of repeating back or paraphrasing what you think you are hearing and gently seeking clarification when the meaning is not clear.

Deep Listening focuses first and foremost on *self-awareness* as the ground for listening and communicating well with others. This may seem paradoxical—pay-

ing more attention to ourselves in order to better communicate with others—but *without some clarity in our relationship to ourselves*, we will have a hard time improving our relationships with others. A clouded mirror cannot reflect accurately. We cannot perceive, receive, or interact authentically with others *unless our self-relationship is authentic*. Likewise, until we are true friends with ourselves, it will be hard to be genuine friends with others. It’s like the too familiar saying, ‘you cannot give what you do not possess’.

Today we are called not only to listen to cry of people, the many suffering people in our broken world, the poor, yes, we need to listen to them surely...but we are also called *to listen to*:

The cry of Mother Earth

The cry of Climatic changes

The cry of Nature

The cry of the Ecological world

**So how do we cultivate and practice this very needed SKILL in our life today for the greater good of our world and ourselves?**

Deep Listening is a way of being in the world that is sensitive to all facets of our experience—external, internal, and contextual (body, mind, and speech). It involves listening to parts we frequently are deaf to.



The listener's job is simply to be present and by their presence to hold a space for the other person to explore their felt senses and chosen issues. It is not the listener's job to "be helpful," to problem-solve or commiserate or evaluate, but simply to be mindfully present, including being mindful of their own felt senses as they arise.

The one and great lesson is cultivating the discipline of getting in touch with one's inner self, the source of inner Wisdom/Teacher which is inherent in each one of us. How do we do this? By practicing mindful living, being fully awake in daily life, in our daily interaction, consciously aware of why we are doing what we are doing, why we say what we say, and not simply living like a zombie or frantically running around trying to save the whole world.... have no time, no energy for self-reflection and self-care...

The late Ram Dass shared that there was always a focus on space, an internal space of our hearts and minds. He did not mean the physical space, but the internal space of our hearts and minds. And this showed up in how he approached supporting people especially in his deep listening to them. He continues to say that it is easy to focus on how we can fix or change someone. "If they would just do *this*," or "If only they did not do *that*." However, for Ram Dass,

it came back to us, to the space we held out for the other. In a listening situation, our job is to be a space where nothing in me is preventing the changes that are wanting to emerge in the other.

And Ram Dass used to say,

***"I can do nothing for you but work on myself...you can do nothing for me but work on yourself!"***

*The habits of mind and behavior that keeps us on the treadmill of the assumption that we know what the other needs or wants is intractable, until we truly learn the art of listening deeply... it is at this juncture that we will be listening deeply and interacting from heart to heart.!*

# The dimension of listening in the ministry of consolation

The Italian Hospital of La Plata: a community at the service of life

Life is a gift from God, a treasure that is entrusted to us and that we are called to “take care of” especially when a person is sick and, more than ever, “needs CONSOLATION” (cf UR, Introduction to the Rules of Hospital, p 129). The art of taking care of the sick is always integral, it embraces all the dimensions of the person, therefore we speak of healing, of salvation, of fullness.

The charismatic understanding of St. Magdalene leads her to say that “*an Institute that enjoys bearing the name of Charity would be greatly lacking if there were no visits to the sick*” (Introduction to the Rules of the Hospital, page 129), remembering that “Look and do the same” that we find, over and over again, in the person and action of Jesus.

Called to follow in the footsteps of Magdalene, our religious community lives in the midst of another community, which is the Hospital Community, that is, we are 5 sisters who live in a hospital that has 300 beds, which cares for an average of 2,800 patients per month and in which approximately 1,600 people work. We live a very rich ex-

perience of immersion and availability, close to those who suffer all the time, especially when there is a greater necessity, for serious and sudden illnesses, or of children or young people. Our mission is all-embracing: being nurses, we have the direct possibility of being close to the sick and thus we can live a pastoral approach by accompanying each person and each family in their pain. Called to make Jesus known and loved through this ministry, placed by Saint Magdalene within the perennial and continuous ministries, we have infinite encounters that are an opportunity to make God’s Charity visible, accompanying in this way the suffering humanity so that it can have the eyes of faith.

“*This is the sign that we live in him. Whoever says he remains in him must live like him.*” (1 Jn. 2:5b-6) We feel called to accompany them in situations of pain, doubt, discouragement, fear, loneliness, mistrust, in the same way as Jesus, with concrete gestures of listening, being present, closeness and compassion that reveal God’s tenderness. Our pastoral experience tells us that we must not suppose faith in the sick people we meet and in their families, in the staff





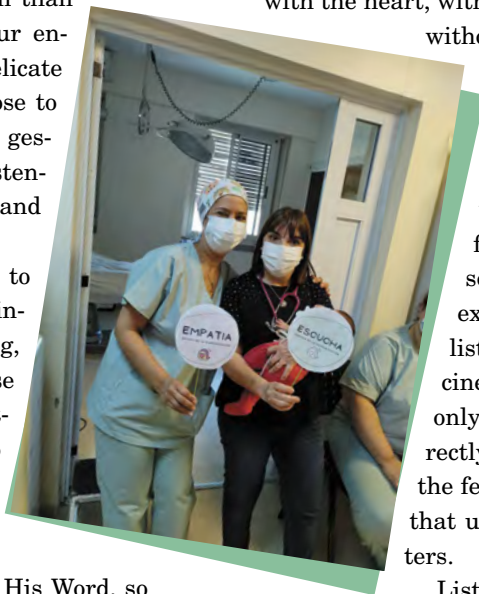
we accompany and with whom we share this mission. As “Women of the Word” we feel called to bring it to life, renew it and announce it to those who do not know it, so that they may personally encounter Christ.

After almost two years of pandemic, even the Health Groups that face death and failure much more often than in other times, need our encouragement and our delicate care. We want to be close to everyone, with human gestures that comfort, listening to their outpouring and their worries.

Magdalene spoke to us about comforting, instructing and assisting, and we believe that these actions arise from the attention and listening to the person who suffers. Just as the beginning of our love for God consists in listening to the His Word, so too the beginning of love for our neighbour consists in listening to him. This is why our primary service when we visit and accompany the sick is to devote time to listening. In this mission, which aims to foster the experience of the goodness of God, we meet two main groups. Firstly, those we visit and who recover their health, where the aim is to help them know and get closer to the Lord, integrating faith into their daily life for the moment when they return home. Secondly,

those who must be prepared for a total abandonment, waiting for the moment of the definitive passage to the Celestial Homeland. In both cases, empathic listening is the element that generates life and healing.

Day after day, we witness that listening has a real therapeutic value. After visiting a patient that we have solely listened to, when the conversation is over, very often he says things like: “Thank you! You helped me a lot” and we can say that we didn’t say a word, but only listened carefully, with the heart, with affection, with interest, without interrupting, without moralizing, without offering solutions. Others say: “I feel relieved of a burden”, wanting to express that they feel more relieved. And so, again and again, we experience that through listening we are like medicine for others. We listen not only to what the person is directly expressing, but also to the feelings, ideas or thoughts that underlie the words he utters.



Listening is a personal act, one lets the word of the other resonate in oneself in a very special way. It is a moment in which you “take in” the other person and he realizes what is happening within a person. For this reason, he places his trust in us. It makes us more human and humanizes bonds and reality. It is also a profoundly spiritual act and, for this reason, not only the word, but also the person of the other is introduced into our life. Listening gives us the opportunity to illuminate and

see the inner world, connecting the resources that each person has with their difficulties, so that they can help themselves.

Returning to the hospital, because there are highly complex services (bone marrow



transplants, liver transplants, dialysis, obstetrics, cardiology, neonatal and adult intensive care, as well as medical and surgical clinics) we receive patients from other cities within the province, accompanied by their families who often have no economic resources to stay in the city. By listening to them too, we have the chance to become mothers, sisters and, why not, friends while they are passing through, waiting for a diagnosis and treatment. We live in close contact with suffering or with situations where life, so vulnerable, needs help. We see how fragile the human being is, the equal dignity and condition of all. We are God's instruments and he wants to express this through each of us, who listens and lends an ear to every person who suffers.

When we listen, tensions are released, loneliness decreases, worries are shared, new horizons open up, a sense of communion and family is created. Listening seems easy, but it is not, it is an art and like all arts, it needs to be educated. By listening with the whole person, eyes, hands, gestures, lips, body positions, you listen with all your heart, accepting all the feelings of the other, respecting silences and tears. What do we feel in people's lives? We feel their lights, desires, worries, frus-

trations, fears ... And this requires us to be barefoot, because we are treading on a Sacred Ground (cf. Ex 3,5).

At the end of a day, after having entered into relationships with so many sick people

and families, our hearts are full of faces, stories, names, joys, sorrows. In our community prayer during Vespers and in the last hour of the evening, we collect these pearls of life, of those who trust in us because starting from

their faith they meet with God through us. We present each one as we praise our God who heals and saves his people. This relationship between the sick person, us and God, is a space of faith in which life and learning are generated.



Let us listen to this very appropriate phrase-invitation for our time, in which we find many injured people, not only inside the hospital, but also in our environments, in broken families, etc., "We are people who receive injured people", being like Jesus who went about doing good and healing the sick. Thus, we will proclaim the Kingdom which is already among us. We thank God who has given us this gift of the Gospel and our Charism and

we ask to have the grace of living it in Community, through Listening and Consolation.

*"At the end of our journey they will tell us: Have they lived? Have they loved? And, without saying anything, we will open our hearts overflowing with names."*

[Mgr. Pedro Casaldáliga]

by **Sr. Magdalena Amarilla, Bárbara Heiderscheid, Gabriela Oviedo, Valeria Amaya and Mariana Litmanovich**



# "LISTENING IS THE EPIPHANY OF LOVE"

## Interview with Mother Elide Testa

**M**other Elide Testa has held positions of responsibility in the Institute for many years. Today she lives in the Canossian community of Tradate.

*Mother Elide, in your experience of leading the Institute and in accompanying the sisters, what place does listening have?*

For a sister who in the ministry of authority – at all levels: Institute, provinces, local communities, individuals – listening is irreplaceable because if done with the right conditions, it allows us to have a constructive dialogue and make shared discernments, with the aim of giving everyone peace of heart. In this way, it becomes the basis of the construction of the community as a house of charity and enculturated charismatic ministerial choices. Mary is a woman of the Spirit. She listens to the Angel who brings the divine proclamation, and then she dialogues with him to be able to say her “Yes” freely and willingly. *“And the Word in her became flesh”* making her a totally fulfilled human being because she is docile and unconditionally available. Mary obeys because listening is synonymous with obedience (“ob-audire”), that is, active listening.

*What do you think are the conditions for fruitful listening?*

Listening to and interiorizing the Word. Being “Inwardly well-founded” (Having a

solid interior foundation) as our Foundress exhorts us, in order to have spiritual authority and to be credible. It is a listening capable of giving life, of taking care, of making people grow (the word “authority” comes from the Latin “augere”, making something grow). It means welcoming without letting oneself be absorbed by the organizational, managerial, and ministerial aspects of life. According to St. Benedict, the care of people is the opposite of the will to dominate, to the “maternalism” that makes them dependent. Listening requires the ability to give time, one’s own psychic, intellectual, affective, spiritual energies, and the ability to choose one’s words with care in order to foster an ever more mature life in Christ. It must also be a listening that motivates through dialogue, leads to discernment, and a shared decision. In this way, it will foster the Sister’s growth in responsibility by delegating a service, a ministry, a region of the province and allowing her to exercise this responsibility independently within the limits given in the mandate. In the Church today we breathe this new air in the climate of synodal paths starting from the base, the impulse to seek together that requires listening for enculturated discernments.

*How do you think it is possible to implement it in our communities?*

Living this listening is possible if we love in the manner of Christ who gave his life for

## "Listening is the epiphany of love"

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us. It is an uncomfortable, gratuitous love, which can only be born from dwelling in the heart of Jesus while we dialogue. It requires the effort to improve the relational virtues that the Foundress expresses when speaking of poverty. Practice in the poverty of the mind is necessary because there is no room to listen for those who have a mind full of their own convictions or who are too sure of themselves. We need poverty of heart: there is no space for listening for those who have hearts full of prejudices, worries, tensions, and anxieties. But above all, we need that humility that Saint Magdalene presents to us as the highest relational virtue.

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*When did you find it difficult to listen to others?*

First of all, when, because of unforeseen events, it was not possible to prepare and spend time quietly in mental prayer of the heart or when one's spirit was restless for various reasons. Then you feel unable to face the weight of the encounter. Perhaps there was also fear of the reactions of that person; reactions already experienced and so there was the feeling of knowing from the start that there was not a sincere readiness to encounter the person. In short, when you do not have the strength to "lose for love". The previous conflict has not yet been overcome and you think there is too much difference between you and the other from the start. When there is some intolerance in your heart. In these cases, I feel that I must first pacify my heart in prayer and think that I

too am loved by God, just as I am: poor, fragile, sinful.

*What advice would you give to the Superiors of the Canossian world in order to cultivate this attitude of listening?*

I repeat the expression of Saint Magdalene: "To be inwardly well-founded". And so, we always start from the Word! Prayer to the Holy Spirit, the spirit of prayer that requires inner silence to dwell in the heart of Christ while listening. A house resists the elements if it has a solid foundation! Readiness to respond when a sister challenges us: a listening that demands going out of oneself, forgetting urgencies and worries in order to welcome her, accepting her to the point of finding ourselves in her (as Bruno Forte wrote). An empathetic listening. Generosity in the gift of oneself, of one's own energies, of one's own time. This is pure gratuitousness; it is the opposite of the jealous possession of those who place themselves at the center. The recognition of otherness as a gift to be welcomed, not as a risk from which to defend oneself. As the words of the Foundress urge us: "Take the form of the sister". In a word, love. A listening that leads to a serene dialogue is the epiphany of love.: Where there is no dialogue there is no love and where there is no love there is no dialogue. In short, the fatigue of dialogue is the same fatigue of love. We were loved first: therefore, we are called to be a reflection of Trinitarian love through this way of listening.

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# SYNOD, A PATH OF LISTENING

## The diocesan phase of the path towards the 2023 Assembly of Bishops has begun

On Sunday, October 10, Pope Francis officially opened the synodal process that will lead to the celebration of the Synod of Bishops scheduled for 2023. From 17 October the diocesan phase of the Synod opened, and we will live this phase until April 2022 at the level of the individual diocesan Churches,

It is a “consultation of the people of God”, as indicated by the apostolic constitution *Episcopalis communio* of Pope Francis published on September 15, 2018, that “transforms” the Synod of Bishops, which was established by Pope Paul VI on September 15, 1965, with the apostolic letter-Motu Proprio *Apostolica*

throughout the world, accompanied by a questionnaire and a vademecum. The same text was also sent to the dicasteries of the Roman Curia, to the Unions of Major Superiors and Superiors, to the federations of consecrated life, to the international movements of the laity, and to the universities and faculties of theology.

The very word “synod” comes from the Greek “walking together. The Pope, therefore, calls all of us to a great journey of reflection, listening, storytelling, and dreaming for the future, which will last a few years and aims at the renewal of the way of being Church. The Synod is an ecclesial and spiritual experience.

Ecclesial, because being Church always implies the willingness to walk together, sharing a vision, a perspective that attracts us, and identifying the stages and processes that activate a lasting and effective change. Spiritual, because it is an experience inspired by the Holy Spirit and retains a wide margin of openness and unpredictability, characteristics of the Spirit, who blows and goes

where he wants.

Synod means the right and power of speech is entrusted to all. The capillarity of the Synod, characterized by the attitude of listening, allows every believer and baptized person to bring his own contribution of thought. Synod means choosing together, activating processes of change, the fruit of listening and discernment.

For this reason, the Synod must also be a great moment of prayer and hope. A prayer of invocation so that the journey may be able to enhance the richness of diversity, bringing them towards unity; in the hope of opening the way to the future and to the mission of the whole Church.



*sollicitudo* in response to the desire of the fathers of the Second Vatican Council to keep alive the experience of the Council itself. Born as an assembly of representatives of bishops whose task is to help the Pope with its advice in the governance of the universal Church and on specific doctrinal and pastoral questions, today the Synod is open to wider participation of the people of God.

What we are experiencing is in fact a phase of listening “from “below to the faithful who are so dear to the Pope, and is the main novelty introduced by the reform of the Synod of Bishops desired by Francis. The General Secretariat of the Synod sent the Preparatory Document to the individual dioceses



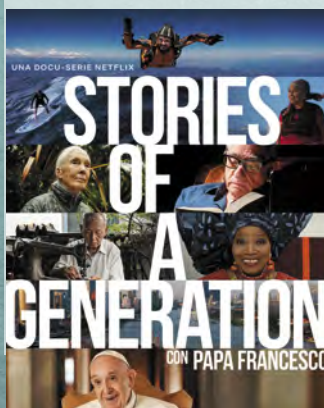
# HINTS ON LINE AND OFFLINE

## A NETFLIX SERIES

### "Stories of a generation"

**Pope Francis**

Pope Francis has landed on Netflix with a new docuseries from his book "Sharing the Wisdom of Time". "Stories of a Generation" is a documentary series in 4 episodes, a choral story about the elderly as a treasure to be rediscovered from an unprecedented and original point of view, in the eyes of the younger generations. Women and men over 70 from all over the world tell talented young film-makers under 30 in front of the camera, a total of one year of shooting and 18 stories from 5 continents. Each of the episodes touches on one of the great themes that unite the human being - love, dreams, struggle, work - through the events and experiences of men and women, famous people and heroes of everyday life, representing ethnic groups, social statuses, cultures and religions of the whole planet and when put together recount humanity with its universal values.



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## A BOOK FOR WALKING

### Synodality. The biblical foundation of walking together

**by Aldo Martin**

The terms "synod" and "synodality", which are proposed as essential ecclesiological categories today, simply do not appear in the New Testament. Yet, even if not explicitly named, they are dimensions authentically present in the communities of the origins and emerge in many founding texts. The essay by the biblical scholar Aldo Martin has the merit of highlighting them, gathering them around the historical-narrative moments of the ecclesial unfolding, as they appear in the biblical source. The different meanings - a church which is convened, which is implemented, which is structured, which is sent and which is oriented towards the éschaton - constitute the backbone of a biblical synodal ecclesiology.





# NURTURING REFLECTION



## AN ANIMATED SHORT FILM FOR THINKING

### Who are you?

by **Julio Pot**

When everything goes wrong we believe that it will be like this forever, that we will be forced to suffer indefinitely and that we will never find a way out. Life, on the other hand, is always able to surprise us, amaze us and change things unexpectedly. "Who are you?", Julio Pot's animated short film, is a work that makes us reflect on these aspects because it investigates the unpredictability of our paths and the delicacy of human life. The film tells the story of a well-known writer with a creative block and his encounter with a girl who will change his state of crisis. With a simple and essential beauty, played between black and white and a tint of red, this short film teaches us that from unanswered questions you can always learn something new and that we should not be afraid of the future that awaits us. Whatever it is.

## A VIDEO TO REFLECT ON America in one room

What happens when 500 strangers with different beliefs are brought into a room to discuss politics? The independent organization Helena, in partnership with Stanford University's Center for Deliberative Democracy, has decided to find out. 523 US citizens - representative of the entire US electorate by race, income, age, gender, party affiliation, region, and education - met for a weekend in Dallas, Texas. During the event, participants gathered in small groups of 15 to discuss often divisive issues such as immigration reform and health care, and also listened to panels of experts discussing these issues, but in a new way, not based on polemical opposition, but on information and mutual listening. The result? A wonderful experience of dialogue, well told in this video.



## POVERTY IN THE WORLD: an urgent appeal!

When world governments undersigned the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, they pledged to eradicate hunger and all forms of malnutrition by 2030. The data at the time gave us hope: the number of people suffering from hunger worldwide had been decreasing constantly since 2005 and the same was true for poverty. But today the situation has changed profoundly: in recent years, hunger and poverty are unfortunately on the increase all over the world. According to the United Nations World Food Program, as many as 45 million people are on the brink of famine, 16 million more than at the



start of the pandemic crisis. The pandemic undoubtedly weighs, as well as the effects of climate change, but internal conflicts within countries are also among factors of this worsening. This situation too can be read as the fruit of that "throwaway culture" that Pope Francis has been denouncing for some time: an appeal that the richest countries and the international community cannot ignore. It is urgent to intervene and respond to the needs of the least and restore dignity.

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## IMPORTANT PROGRESS SINCE COP26, but more courage needed to combat climate crisis

The 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference was held in Glasgow in the first half of November. The appointment, which brought together the 197 signatory countries of the Paris Agreement, was highly anticipated: the participating States were expected to reach binding agreements to meet the goal of containing the increase in global average temperatures below the threshold of 1.5 degrees Celsius by 2100. A goal that seems further away, given that some large countries have opposed the commitment to eliminate coal as a fossil fuel altogether. One thing is clear: in the past two weeks, the eyes of the whole world have been on the climate crisis like never before. Growth

in importance in public debate, overdue for such a long time, is certainly positive, but now is the time for action and concreteness. We cannot afford to divert attention because this is the challenge of the century.





## FIGHT AGAINST THE PANDEMIC: we will only overcome it by collaborating fraternally

To put an end to the Covid-19 pandemic, the majority of the world population must urgently become immune to the worst effects of the virus. This virus that has shown that it does not care about national barriers: it is a planetary emergency. The most effective tool today to achieve the goal of immunity is the vaccine, a technology that humanity has often relied on in the past to reduce the mortality rate of infectious diseases. In less than 12 months since the start of the pandemic, several research teams have taken up the challenge and developed vaccines that can protect us. But now the challenge is to make these vac-



cines available to people around the world, to protect people and avoid the development of new variants. At present (January 2022), 58.6% of the world population has received at least one dose of a vaccine, 9.28

billion doses have been administered globally, and 27.89 million are administered every day. But only 8.5% of people in low-income countries have received at least one dose. This is why it will be imperative that people in all countries - not just rich countries - can receive the protection they need.

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## BIODIVERSITY, a treasure to be looked after together

One of the most serious threats of the climate crisis is the loss of biodiversity, that is, the coexistence in the same ecosystem of different animal and plant species capable of creating a balance thanks to their mutual relationships. It is the priceless treasure, the infinite wealth of the variety of life forms on earth. Today more than ever, it is threatened by an unsustainable development model, which conceives natural environments only as a resource to be exploited. However, the history of the last few decades shows that it is possible to resist and save nature. A few examples. In the last 40 years - thanks to an approach to safeguarding biodiversity



that has seen public authorities, companies, scientific research and local communities join forces - humanity has achieved some very important objectives: among the most notable, to increase the population of mountain gorillas in East and Central Africa, reach 68% of the repopulation level of giant pandas in their natural habitat and, for the first time in a century, increase the number of tigers in the wild.

# THE MANIFESTO OF NON-HOSTILE COMMUNICATION

It is a paper that lists ten principles of style useful for improving the style and behaviour of those on the Net. The Manifesto of non-hostile communication is a commitment of shared responsibility. It wants to encourage respectful and civil behaviour. It wants the Net to be a welcoming and safe place for everyone. There are 10 principles of style. A commitment to take on - not only online!



## 1. VIRTUAL IS REAL

I only say and write on the net things that I have the courage to say in person.

## 2. YOU ARE WHAT YOU COMMUNICATE

The words I choose tell about the person I am: they represent me.



## 3. WORDS SHAPE THOUGHT

I take all the time I need to express what I think.



## 4. BEFORE SPEAKING ONE MUST LISTEN

No one is always right, not even me. I must listen with honesty and openness.







## 5. WORDS ARE A BRIDGE

I choose the words to understand, to make myself understood, to get closer to others.

## 6. WORDS HAVE CONSEQUENCES

I know that my every word can have consequences, great or small.



## 7. SHARING IS A RESPONSIBILITY

I share texts and images only after having read, evaluated and understood them.

## 8. IDEAS CAN BE DISCUSSED. PEOPLE HAVE TO BE RESPECTED

I do not turn into an enemy to be annihilated those who hold opinions that I do not share.



## 9. INSULTS ARE NOT ARGUMENTS

I do not accept insults and aggression, not even in favour of my thesis.

## 10. EVEN SILENCE COMMUNICATES

When the best choice is to keep quiet, I remain silent.



# E V E TO ACCOMPANY

## J A N U A R Y 2 0 2 2

18-25

WEEK OF PRAYER  
FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY

"We saw his star rising and have come to do him homage." (Mt. 2:2)  
The star, a sign that led the Magi from distant places and from different cultures towards the infant Jesus, represents an image of how Christians unite while approaching the Christ.

23

SUNDAY OF THE WORD

"Happy are those who hear the Word of God." (Lk. 11:28)  
The Sunday of the Word of God allows Christians to reclaim the secure invitation of Jesus to listen to and treasure his Word and offers the world its witness of hope that enables it to transcend the difficulties of the present moment.

## F E B R U A R Y 2 0 2 2

2

26° WORLD DAY OF CONSECRATED LIFE

A day dedicated to the vocation of Consecrated Life that in various modalities reveals the Love of God for humanity and the entire universe.

8

SAINT BAKHITA  
PRAYER AGAINST TRAFFICKING

She is a pearl of rare value of the Canossian charism, a woman of prayer and mercy, "Universal Sister" especially close to the women and men, victims of human trafficking. "Madre Moretta" challenges us with a strong message for today.

# N T S Y THE JOURNEY

27

ANNIVERSARY OF THE FIRST DEPARTURE FOR HONG KONG

We remember the first four Canossian sisters, “pioneers” who answered the invitation of the local bishop and, in following the prophetic intuition of Mother Luigia Grassi, left Italy to found the first Canossian mission.

M A R C H

2 0 2 2

1

BIRTH OF  
ST. MAGDALENE OF CANOSSA

14-15-16

EASTER TRIDUUM

24

WORLD DAY OF  
MISSIONARY MARTYRS

It is a day of prayer and fasting in memory of the sisters and brothers who gave their life to bring the Gospel “even to the ends of the earth”.

A P R I L

2 0 2 2

17

EASTER SUNDAY

“This is what Easter is: it is the exodus, the passage from the slavery of sin, from evil to the freedom of love, of goodness. Because God is life, only life, and we are His glory – the living ones. Our truest destiny is to be transformed by love.” (Pope Francis)

# THE “OLLAS POPULARES” IN PARAGUAY

## Sharing in order to survive

After two years of the COVID pandemic, also in Paraguay there is continued hardship resulting in persistent and devastating socio-economical and health consequences. There are always many dead, while an even greater number of people, although healed, have seen their health being compromised. But there are many and various psychological, social and economic results that are seriously oppressing the weakest group of this country. Due to the restrictive measures adopted by the government to prevent the spread of the virus, many people are not working and many others have been dismissed or have lost their ability to work. This has reduced many people into poverty, seriously compromising also the feeding of entire families.

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In times of great crisis, especially in South America, when a certain number of families are unable to feed themselves, there arise spontaneous groups of people who organize the “Ollas Populares”, that is the “peoples’ cooking pots”, to respond as far as possible, to the feeding of all (particularly of children). People come together to prepare a meal that will then be distributed to everyone. Meat, pasta, vegetables, bread are provided by private donors, shops and super-

markets and also charitable organizations and local volunteers. However, in spite of the great generosity witnessed in various forms, much has still to be purchased.

The *Ollas Populares* represent an amazing example of solidarity and mutual help among the same needy families, each one contributing what it can such as a place to prepare the food, manual work and also some ingredients depending on their own possibility.

By living and working beside them for almost twenty years, the Canossian sisters share with the people their hardships and hopes in a slow but constant commitment to improve the health, education and social conditions of those living at the margins of Encarnaci n. Also in this period of pandemic, besides maintaining the activities at the Health Centre “*Sagrada Familia*” and the Infant Education Centre “*Santa Magdalena de Canossa*”, Sr Noelia and her sisters have promoted some 5 *Ollas Populares* in the Barrio *Sagrada Familia* of Encarnaci n. On the Foundation’s YouTube it is possible to view a brief video of this reality (to view it go to YouTube and search for “COVID Paraguay\_Missioni aperte”).





Still today, there are guaranteed some 500 meals a day for the children, the elderly and the unemployed. Sadly, with the continuation of the pandemic and the resulting restrictions, there is always someone new who approaches an Olla to receive at least a plate of food. The little is shared among many, even to the cleaning of the pot.

In a context of poverty and degradation, small communities are forming around the five cooking pots and, at the warmth of the fire cooking, is added the warmth of concrete and sober solidarity. The *Ollas Populares* are a wonderful example of how sharing is the key to survival. Day after day, month after month, even in the *Barrio Sagrada Familia* one continues to go forward by holding onto each other.

Today the pots are emptying much faster while the cost to replenish the ingredients to prepare the meals is increasing. The price has doubled, if not tripled, also due to the continued closure of the borders with nearby Argentina where most of the ingredients could be bought more cheaply. Today, everything is bought in Paraguay at an exorbitant cost.

More than 500 among children, mothers and the elderly need the fires of the *Ollas Populares* not to be extinguished and that the cooking pots can be refilled with food to be prepared and distributed. To continue to feel the warmth of a hot plate of food in

one's hands, also transmits the "warmth of solidarity" of a humanity that wants to share with the people what is necessary to live.

We are all looking at the New Year that has just begun with renewed hope and openness to the new, in the knowledge that all of us must face small or big challenges. Some of these, if we want, can cross over into the lives of other people. As the Canossian Foundation VOICA, we have already assured our concrete support to give continuity to the Canossian education and health activities and to the people of Encarnación for the next three years 2022-2024.

Being able to rely on your closeness and concrete assistance for the continuity of the *Ollas Populares* would be truly precious for the people of the *Barrio Sagrada Familia*.

For them, it would mean physical survival during this long and difficult pandemic. For each of us, it would mean the "survival" of our humanity that knows how to be neighbour to those far away, close to our sisters and brothers of Paraguay. Aguiyé! (meaning in Guaraní, "thank you"). Your contribution is to be addressed to: **Ollas Paraguay**.



# SUPPORT THE “OLLAS POPULARES” IN PARAGUAY

With the Project “Ollas Populares” we want to continue to guarantee 500+ children, mothers and the elderly that the “people’s cooking pots” can be refilled with food to be prepared and distributed.

To feel the warmth of a hot plate of food in your hands conveys also the “warmth of solidarity” of a humanity that wants to share with them what is necessary to survive.

## *“Peoples’ Cooking Pots” – sharing as the key to survival*

WHAT YOU CAN DO!



€ 10,00 / day – Wood to cook the 5 “Cooking pots”

42

€ 110,00 Ingredients to  
prepare 1 cooking pot =  
75 plates of food



€ 15,00 = 10 plates of food



**TO SEND YOUR ASSISTANCE:**

**ADDRESS TO: Ollas Paraguay**

## Canossian Foundation Voica For a better life...

Address:  
via della Stazione di Ottavia, 70  
00135 Roma

email: [fondazione@canossian.org](mailto:fondazione@canossian.org)  
C:F: 08069261009  
Telephone: +39 06 308280676

### Donations:

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#### BANK TRANSFER IN EURO

Banca Popolare di Sondrio – Roma  
Codice IBAN:  
IT83 E056 9603 2110 0000 5128X88  
BIC/SWIFT: POSOIT22  
In favour of:  
Fondazione Canossiana VOICA  
Reason for payment:  
Ollas Paraguay

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#### CREDIT TRANSFER IN US DOLLARS

BANCA POPOLARE DI SONDRIO – Roma  
CODICE IBAN:  
IT53 D056 9603 211V ARUS 0005 128  
Codice BIC / SWIFT: POSOIT22  
In favour of:  
Fondazione Canossiana VOICA  
Reason for transfer:  
Ollas Paraguay

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#### POSTAL ORDER N. 62011531

In favour of:  
Fondazione Canossiana VOICA  
Reason for payment:  
Ollas Paraguay

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#### NON-TRANSFERABLE BANK CHEQUE

In favour of:  
Fondazione Canossiana VOICA

## LET'S DO IT A BALANCE



*At the end of this number of VitaPiù, some questions to help us integrate – make real – the various reflections being stimulated by reading these articles of the Canossian publication.*

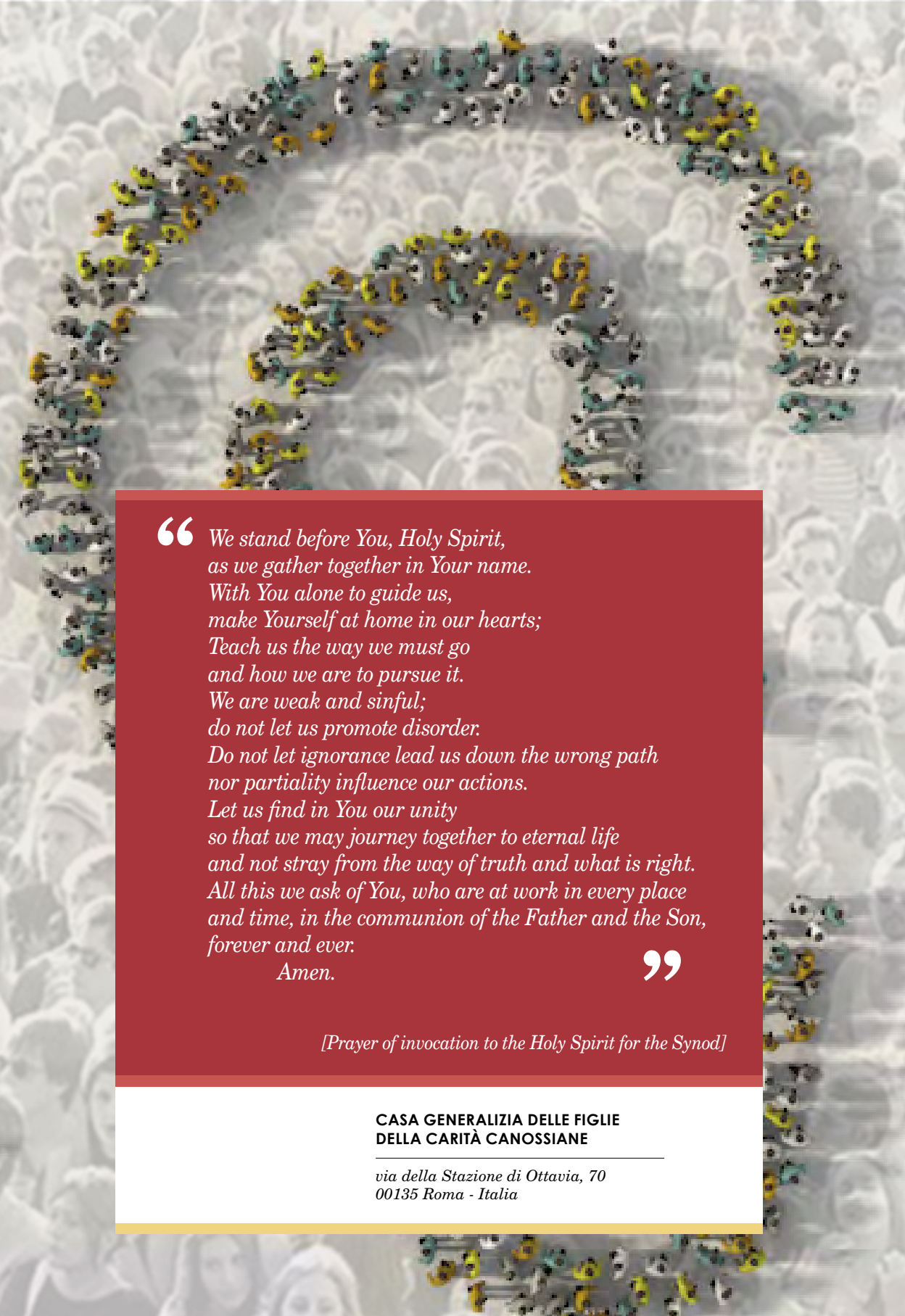
*- How do I live the aspect of inner listening?*

*In my daily life, am I able to make space for silence? How can I best protect/cherish it?*

*- How can I grow in listening to others?*

*To what steps of conversion am I called to better reach out to the other, to make space for them in my life? What do I lack to learn the art of deep listening?*

*- Where in my community, in my ministry, in my daily work do I become aware that there is a greater need to listen? What attentiveness can I cultivate?*



**“** *We stand before You, Holy Spirit,  
as we gather together in Your name.  
With You alone to guide us,  
make Yourself at home in our hearts;  
Teach us the way we must go  
and how we are to pursue it.  
We are weak and sinful;  
do not let us promote disorder.  
Do not let ignorance lead us down the wrong path  
nor partiality influence our actions.  
Let us find in You our unity  
so that we may journey together to eternal life  
and not stray from the way of truth and what is right.  
All this we ask of You, who are at work in every place  
and time, in the communion of the Father and the Son,  
forever and ever.*

*Amen.* **”**

*[Prayer of invocation to the Holy Spirit for the Synod]*

**CASA GENERALIZIA DELLE FIGLIE  
DELLA CARITÀ CANOSSIANE**

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*via della Stazione di Ottavia, 70  
00135 Roma - Italia*