

Homily for COMMUNICATIONS SUNDAY

Dear brothers and sisters,

Last year on communications Sunday we reflected on the need to “Come and See”. Well, 'Come and Listen' is the theme for this year. Listening is paramount when it come to good communication and a condition for genuine dialogue.

A respected psychiatrist, accustomed to treating the wounds of the mind, was once asked what the greatest need of human beings is. He replied: “The greatest desire is to be heard”. Saint Paul would affirm that “faith comes through hearing” (cf. Rom 10:17). Among the five senses, the one favoured by God seems to be hearing,

But if the message is unwelcome, human beings tend to “close their ears” so they do not have to listen. The refusal to listen often ends up turning into aggression towards the other, as happened to those listening to the deacon St Stephen who, 'covering their ears, all turned on him at once and began to stone him' (cf. Acts 7:57).

Fundamentally, listening is a dimension of love. When anyone says to you, 'thank you for listening", to me that is a great compliment.

We all have ears, but many times even those with perfect hearing are unable to hear another person. Listening concerns the whole person. The true seat of listening is the heart. Though he was very young, King Solomon proved himself wise because he asked the Lord to grant him a “listening and understanding heart” (cf. 1 Kings 3:9). That could be our prayer as well.

Mary is our shining example here. Regarding the extraordinary events surrounding the birth of Jesus, Scripture says: Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. In receiving the Word of God through our ears, we too allow it, as it were, to drop from our head into our heart so that we can make it our own. And then hopefully in will end up in our hands when we convert it into action.

There is a kind of hearing that is the opposite of listening i.e. eavesdropping. In fact, eavesdropping and spying, exploiting others for

our own interests, is an ever-present temptation that nowadays seems to have become more acute in the age of social networks.

The lack of listening, which we experience so often in daily life, is unfortunately also evident in public life, where, instead of listening to each other, we often “talk past one another”.

In reality, in many dialogues we do not communicate at all. We are simply waiting for the other person to finish speaking in order to impose our point of view.

Listening is therefore the first indispensable ingredient of dialogue and good communication.

In the Church, too, there is a great need to listen to and to hear one another. It is the most precious and life-giving gift we can offer each other as Christians.

Thus, the Protestant theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer reminds us that the first service we owe to others consists in listening to them. "Whoever does not know how to listen to his brother or sister will soon no longer be able to listen to God either".

The most important task in pastoral activity is the “apostolate of the ear” – to listen before speaking, as the Apostle James exhorts: “Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak” (1:19). Freely giving some of our own time to listen to people is the first act of charity. There is no substitute for it. Here is a little ditty we learnt as youngsters.

*A wise old owl sat on an oak
The more he saw the less he spoke
The less he spoke the more he heard
Why can you be like that wise old bird?*