

## Listening Deeply

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*I have come here to encourage you to take this synodal process seriously and to tell you that the Holy Spirit needs you. And this is true: the Holy Spirit needs us. Listen to it by listening to yourself. Don't leave anyone out or behind.*

*Address Of The Holy Father Francis To The Faithful Of The Diocese Of Rome,  
18 September 2021*

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We all know the adage 'It's good to talk'. We know how important communication is for every relationship. But talking must be matched by listening. Indeed, often the listening is more demanding, and really it should come first. So it is with this 'Synodal' invitation. The pathway is listening, the task is discerning together the important lessons and prompting of the Holy Spirit, and the outcome greater participation in the life and mission given to us by the Lord.

***Cardinal Vincent Nichols, Pastoral Letter 3 October 2021***

Listening is **the** method of the Synodal pathway. Listening deeply together will support us to discern what the Spirit of God may be saying to the us. Discernment is the attitude or stance of people who believe that God is always both present and active in the details of our lives. It relies on the conviction that he will reveal his plans and purposes to us if we make an effort to be attentive. We fully understand discernment only by doing it. It begins with listening.

Everyone in the Synod process will listen. However, if have a role in hosting a conversation or specifically listening so as to hear the whole conversation and offer feedback, you will benefit from preparing well.

### **Active Listening**

First, like everyone who is sharing, attend to your 'active listening'. The goal is to try and understand others as they are. The core question is: "What is happening in the other person and in me, and how is the Lord working here?" Listen not only to what is said but also to

what the speaker means and what he or she might be experiencing at a deeper level – thus listening actively.

Active listening means:

- We listen to what is being said, not focussing on what we will say afterwards
- We give full attention and presence to the person. We pay attention to more than one level of expression in the other.
- We allow ourselves to be influenced and learn from the other
- We welcome the speaker without judgment – each person is the expert on his or her own life. This requires humility, openness, patience.
- We are able to sit with silence
- We have an awareness that the Holy Spirit speaks to us through the other person.

### **As someone who is hosting a conversation or group**

The aim is to create an atmosphere of trust and welcome, so that people can express themselves more freely. This helps them to take seriously what happens within them as they listen to others and speak. Ultimately, this interior attentiveness makes us more aware of the presence and participation of the Holy Spirit in the process of sharing and discernment.

If working with a group you may want to offer these questions, one at a time, slowly for reflection:

- Do you believe that this group is gathered to do God's work?
- Do you believe that we hear the Holy Spirit in others?
- Will you listen deeply to each other and listen for God?
- Will you hear all opinions and value the person giving them- even when you disagree with the opinion?
- Will you see disagreement as opportunity and not as a threat?
- Will you be open and generous?

Your role:

- Prepare people ahead of time (provide the 'Synod Participant Guide' and all the details people need to take part)
- SOLER (Sit square on (if one-to-one), Open posture, Lean in, Eye Contact, Relax)
- Open questioning – maintain a conversational style
- Ask for clarification – tell me more. Seek understanding rather than offer judgment – 'I'm curious about that...'
- Reflect back what you have heard ("What I heard you say was")

After the listening take time for your own reflection:

- What are you learning about the experience of listening in the Church?