

LISTEN WITH THE EAR OF YOUR HEART

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INTRODUCTION:

The topic given to me was: OBSCULTA: OBLATES LISTENING IN THE WORLD. You are all familiar with the opening of the Prologue of RB: LISTEN O MY CHILD TO THE PRECEPTS OF YOUR MASTER.... INCLINE THE EAR OF YOUR HEARTS. For the Benedictine, this is the main attitude not only in our prayer but in our everyday life and in all the events that happen to us. Although St. Benedict wrote his Rule in the 6th century, today thousands of monks, nuns, sisters, oblates still live by this Rule.

You are invited in these few days to do just that: TO LISTEN TO GOD'S VOICE IN MANY WAYS—IN THE DEPTHS OF YOUR HEART, IN SCRIPTURES, IN GOD'S PEOPLE, IN GOD'S CREATION

I. THE ATTITUDE OF LISTENING IN PRAYER.

When we read the Scriptures or the Holy Rule we listen with the ear of our heart to the message that God may be sending us through the words. In our Benedictine tradition, there has developed a distinct form of prayer called LECTIO DIVINA or divine reading which we usually practice especially in the reading of the Scriptures and the Holy Rule.

In the 12th century, a Carthusian monk called Guigo, described the stages which he saw as essential to the practice of Lectio Divina. There are various ways of practicing Lectio Divina either individually or in groups but Guigo's description remains fundamental. These stages are:

1. LECTIO
2. MEDITATIO
3. ORATIO
4. CONTEMPLATIO
5. ACTIO

He said that the first stage is lectio (reading) where we read the Word of God, slowly and reflectively so that it sinks into us. Any passage of Scripture can be used for this way of prayer but the passage should not be too long.

The second stage is meditatio (reflection) where we think about the text we have chosen and ruminate upon it so that we take from it what God wants to give us.

The third stage is oratio (response) where we leave our thinking aside and simply let our hearts speak to God. This response is inspired by our reflection on the Word of God.

The fourth stage of Lectio Divina is contemplatio (rest) where we let go not only of our own

ideas, plans and meditations but also of our holy words and thoughts. We simply rest in the Word of God. We listen at the deepest level of our being to God who speaks within us with a still small voice. As we listen, we are gradually transformed from within. Obviously this transformation will have a profound effect on the way we actually live and the way we live is the test of the authenticity of our prayer. We must take what we read in the Word of God into our daily lives. This constitutes the final stage which is ACTIO.

II. FACTORS CONDUCIVE TO LISTENING IN PRAYER

A distinction must be made between hearing and listening. One can hear the words of the Scriptures or the Rule without ever applying them to one's own life. St. Benedict is not speaking of passive listening, but of an active engagement with the words we read. Jeremiah Grosse points out an obstacle to this kind of listening:

One of the major obstacles to such listening is either the conscious or unconscious aversion that many people have to silence. We live in an age where we are bombarded by constant noise. This noise can take many forms: car radio, IPOD, television, or continuous idle chatter. . . Silence seems to scare us; however, there is a long tradition among monastic writers which emphasizes the importance of silence in order to be present to God so that one can hear with the ear of the heart. Silence is born of an attentiveness to God's presence in our lives and puts us at the disposal of the word which will be spoken to our heart. (Life Issues, Net)

Silence does not only mean silence of the tongue, but likewise silence of the mind and of the emotions. In our monastery we have what we call the grand silence that is about 10:00 at night when the Sisters have retired to their cells. One may desist from talking at this time but one's mind can be full of worries, preoccupations, etc and one's heart can be in the midst of turmoil and emotional upheavals. So there is a necessity of keeping watch over our hearts and minds so that God's word will not be drowned by internal noises.

Another important element of listening is **solitude**. As missionary Sisters we are engaged in activities throughout the day in school or social action, etc. We try to keep our serenity by taking time out to experience solitude either in our chapel or in our cells or in communing with nature by taking long walks or sitting in a garden or admiring the sunset , etc. It is amazing what divine messages nature can transmit to us when our hearts are open. The first Sunday of each month and an annual 8 day retreat help also in maintaining this inner silence.

Even during busy times in school, our offices or our work we are enjoined to practice AWARENESS or being totally present where we are because in all the events and places, God can speak to us. As a political activist in the time of the Marcos dictatorship I experienced enlightenment about the Gospel message in unlikely circumstances like a workers' conference and a picket line (Story: about the incident in St. Joseph, Solid Mills and Engeneering Equipment)

III. CONVERSION THAT LEADS TO ACTION

If one truly listens , one will hear God's continual call towards conversion., a continuous inner transformation that is subject of a Benedictine vow called: CONVERSATIO MORUM. As the Scripture says: TODAY IF YOU HEAR MY VOICE HARDEN NOT YOUR HEARTS. This

conversion of heart which enables us to transcend egoistic interests enable us to listen to and hear the CRY OF PEOPLE IN NEED. In our context this means:

A. THE VOICES OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD

1. THE CRY OF THE POOR- In the Philippines 2 % of our people own and control 75% of all land and capital. So even we are rich in natural resources, the majority of the people are poor, with no lands or houses of their own and some even not being able to eat three times a day. They are also most often the worst victims of typhoons, floods and other natural calamities which really are not totally natural because mining and logging contribute to the devastation of homes and human casualties. Wage earners are now suffering from insecurity of tenure because of the policy of “flexibility of labor” and “safe labor”. They cannot organize into unions or fight for their rights. There are more and more street families that roam the cities because the farmers in rural areas have no more lands to till and have no possibilities of employment.

Globalization is also responsible for the impoverishment of peoples widening the gap between the rich and the poor. There can be several meanings given to this world. Positively it can mean international solidarity, world citizenship, etc. However, in its original and economic sense Globalization means the integration of the economies of the whole world to the liberal capitalist market economy that is controlled by the Group of Eight.

In spite of its promises of global development and well being, Globalization has not only widened the gap between the rich and the poor , it has actually caused global financial crisis and has contributed greatly to the destruction of the environment. It has forced developing countries to have an export-oriented, import and foreign capital dependent, debt-ridden economy. It has encouraged monoculture both in agriculture and in society, Local governments have lost their sovereignty giving WTO and foreign bodies to dictate policies. Globalization has proven to be more a bane than a boon!

2. MIGRANTS, REFUGESS, STATELESS PEOPLE

Millions of people leave their countries to work abroad because of the lack of good jobs in their homes. In the past 30 years, the number of international migrants has more than doubled, to an estimated 191 million worldwide. These include economic migrants compelled to move to provide for their families, refugees and internally displaced persons fleeing persecution, and victims of human trafficking. Although they may earn money and in fact their remittances provide a false security in the economy of the country, many of them suffer exploitation, loneliness, violence, unfair labor practices. Some even lose their mind or commit suicide. Their children suffer psychological traumas, marriages are destroyed , families disintegrate.

Aside from migrant workers there are internal and external refugees. These have no homes, no jobs, sometimes live for a long time in refugee camps in subhuman conditions

STATELESSNESS refers to the condition of an individual who is not considered as a national by any state. Although stateless people may sometimes also be refugees, the two categories are distinct. Statelessness occurs for a variety of reasons including discrimination against minority groups in nationality legislation, failure to include all residents in the body of citizens when a state becomes independent (state succession) and conflicts of laws between states. (UNCHR). They are the ones who suffer most among “diaspora” people.

3. THE CRY OF WOMEN- Among the poor, the poorest are still the women. Rural women do their share of the agricultural work but are not given title to their lands or even counted as work force. Women and children are commodified and prostituted in a billion dollar industry of prostitution and human trafficking locally and internationally. Daily, one hears of rape, incest, women battering and other forms of violence against women and children. Today statistics show that the majority of AIDS victims are women. In some countries there are horrible crimes against women such as dowry deaths, honor killings and genital mutilation.

THE “WOMAN’S QUESTION” –may be defined as the fact that there is a discrimination, subordination, exploitation and oppression of women AS WOMEN, regardless of race, nationality, class or creed. It is an IDEOLOGICAL, STRUCTURAL, AND GLOBAL PROBLEM. Its ideological root is PATRIARCHY. It is perpetuated through the centuries by 3 important institutions: EDUCATION, RELIGION, and MASS MEDIA. Its fundamental solution lies in a change of consciousness and change in societal structures

4. THE CRY OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES AND CULTURAL MINORITIES.

Indigenous peoples are [ethnic minorities](#) who have been [marginalized](#) as their historical territories became part of a state.^[1] In international or national legislation they are generally defined as having a set of specific rights based on their historical ties to a particular territory, and to their cultural or historical distinctiveness from politically dominant populations. The concept of indigenous people may define them as particularly vulnerable to exploitation, marginalization and oppression by nations or states that may still be in the process of colonialism, or by politically dominant ethnic groups. (WIKEPEDIA)

Indigenous peoples originally owned the land where they are the first inhabitants. Colonizers, local and foreign have robbed them of their ancestral lands and what remains to them are being pillaged by large-scale mining and logging. Their areas are also the last in developmental priorities and are deprived of health , education, and other forms of social services. Foreign colonizers have bastardized their culture and have demonized their native religions

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5. THE CRY OF THE OLD AND THE PHYSICALLY CHALLENGED, THE OSTRACIZED

In spite of current legislations for the **elderly**, one cannot remain deaf to the anguish of the elderly—anguish of loneliness , of helplessness , of being set aside and not given importance. People suffering from different forms of physical or mental handicaps also cry out in their marginalization and in their inability to do the simplest day to day activity , their continuous dependency on others .

Ageism can be defined as "any attitude, action, or institutional structure, which subordinates a person or group because of age or any assignment of roles in society purely on the basis of age"(Webster 25). As an ism, ageism reflects a prejudice in society against older adults. The victims of bigotry and prejudice are generally referred to as minorities. This is not because they are necessarily fewer in number, but because they are deprived of the rights and privileges of the majority

"We live in a culture that reveres youth. To be young is to be alive, sexy, and full of energy. To be old is to be "senile," "worthless," and having "one foot in the grave""(Online 1). This is the attitude most often seen in modern society

Deep-seated psychological and sociological mechanisms . . . give rise to prejudice against **persons with disabilities**. People tend to think in terms of a handicapped person rather than a person who is handicapped. It is imagined or perceived that [the disability] is the central life experience of that person and influences all his other mental and social abilities." When a person's entire being is thus reduced to what is perceived to be a negative characteristic -- her physical or mental impairment -- attitudes about the individual's capabilities in other areas also tend to become negative. This effect has been described as the "spread" phenomenon: Merely from knowledge of the existence of one impairment, many people form negative attitudes about other unrelated characteristics of persons with disabilities. People mistakenly link epilepsy to physical unattractiveness. They shout at . . . blind [people] as if they are deaf and try to lift them, as if they are orthopedically disabled. They erroneously assume that persons with physical disabilities are mentally impaired, and that persons with psychiatric conditions are violent. They speak to persons with physical disabilities as if they were children. (RAGGED EDGE ONLINE)

People with AIDS, Gays, Lesbians are the new lepers of our modern times. They cry out against the discrimination, the prejudices, the disdain and the marginalization they suffer every day. Misunderstanding about AIDs makes people shun AIDS victims and treat them like lepers.

“Homosexuals and gays are discriminated against because they are considered to be a minority group. They are targeted by the heterosexuals because of the failure to recognize them as normal and to respect their lifestyle. Besides, most of the people have a certain religion, like Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, etc. All these religions forbid sexual relationships within the same gender. So, based on what their religion says, they apply it to their surrounding without the conscience of the great harm it does to that individual. Suicide rates have gone haywire lately due to some form of discrimination against the homosexuals.”-(Q&A-WIKI)

B. THE GROANING OF MOTHER EARTH

Everywhere , mother earth is groaning for salvation as the Book of Revelations say. In the Philippines , our virgin forests have been decimated to less than 15 % of the lush virgin forests at the dawn of the Spanish conquest of the Philippines in 1565. This less than 15% are even opened to logging and large-scale mining which is causing the devastations that have happened in the last years—due to typhoons, floods, earthquakes that have cost thousands of lives , homes and livelihood in this largely agricultural country. Most of our rivers in urban area are dead and resemble cesspools rather than rivers. People live in mountains of garbage (Smokey Mountain, Payatas) .Corals and mangroves have been destroyed resulting in less harvest of fish and other seafood which constitute the livelihood of people in coastal areas.

All over the world we hear the news of typhoons, floods, tsunamis, tornados, etc.etc. And they are described as natural disasters. But actually although it is true that these are natural events, the devastations that come with them are human-made. We are aware that we are undergoing a global ecological crisis which has the following characteristics:

1)alteration of planetary circulations and exchange— exchanges of energy between sun and Earth are being altered with consequences for global warming and increased transmission of damaging ultraviolet radiation;

2)land degradation—cropland and food production capacity is being degraded by erosion, desertification, and salinization;

3)water quality degradation— both surfaced waters and groundwater are being polluted by agricultural chemicals and landfill leachates;

○ *4)deforestation and habitat destruction. . .*

○ *;5)species extinction and biotic alterations. . .*

○ *6) wastes and global toxification. . .;*

○ *7)human and cultural degradation—*

long standing human cultures that have lived sustainably for centuries are rapidly degraded and extinguished by non sustainable development.[1]

(Calvin B. deWitt , “ The Religious Foundations of Ecology” in Judith Scherff (ed), The Mother Earth Handbook (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1991), pp253-254.)

The causes of the global ecological crisis are:

○ **Profit-oriented extractive economy (GLOBALIZATION)**

○ **Deforestation**

○ **Mining**

○ **Destructive fishing methods**

○ **Toxic emissions and wastes from industrial activities and vehicles**

○ **Use of ecologically unfriendly energy sources**

○ **Coal**

○ **Nuclear power**

○ **Ecologically unfriendly agricultural and fishing practices**

◇ **Overpopulation**

◇ **Inefficient waste management**

◇ **Unethical use of biotechnology**

◇ **Consumption-driven lifestyles**

◇ **Ecologically unfriendly projects (i.e. dams, etc.)**

◇ **Mechanistic cosmology and misinterpretation of Genesis 1:26-28**

We hear the groaning of creation in the howling of the winds blowing across deserts that used to be lush virgin forests, across barren lands that used to be fertile unspoiled by fertilizers and pesticides and by siltation. We hear the whining of the waves as they splashed through denuded mangroves and move over devastated coral reefs. We can hardly breathe in the polluted air that surround us. We hardly hear the dying sighs of species at the brink of extinction. How seriously have we responded personally and communally to the rape of our earth?

IV. WHAT IS OUR RESPONSE?

Here are some concrete suggestions:

TO THE CRIES OF THE POOR:

- WORK FOR JUSTICE AND TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE IN THE ECONOMIC, POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SYSTEM
 - SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS
 - INCOME GENERATING PROJECTS
 - ACTIVE SOLIDARITY WITH THE STRUGGLE OF THE DIFFERENT SECTORS OF THE POOR FOR THEIR RIGHTS
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- FOR WOMEN
 - - WORK FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN– EDUCATIONAL, ECONOMIC , POLITICAL SOCIAL, SPIRITUAL
 - ESTABLISH OR VOLUNTEER IN WOMEN’S CENTERS
 - JOIN WOMEN’S ORGANIZATIONS
 - JOIN IN EFFORTS TO END ALL FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN
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 - FOR THE MIGRANT WORKERS
 - - WORK FOR ECONOMIC JUSTICE IN THE THIRD WORLD
 - VOLUNTEER IN CENTERS FOR MIGRANT WORKERS
 - JOIN THE ADVOCACY FOR FAIR AND SAFE WORKING CONDITIONS IN HOST COUNTRIES
 - AVOID ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION-BLATANT OR SUBTLE,
 - Their condition cannot leave us indifferent. And we, as Church, recall that by curing the wounds of refugees, of the dispersed and of victims of trafficking we put into practice the commandment of charity that Jesus left us, when He identified Himself with the foreigner,

with one who suffers, with all innocent victims of violence and exploitation.”-Pope Francis-
May 24,2013

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- FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLE AND MINORITIES
- - RAISE AWARENESS ABOUT THE PLIGHT OF IP’S AND MINORITIES
 - BE IN SOLIDARITY WITH THEM IN THEIR STRUGGLE FOR THEIR RIGHTS—LAND, BELIEF SYSTEM, CULTURE, ETC.
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- FOR THE AGED, PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES, ETC.
- - ESTABLISH OR VOLUNTEER IN CENTERS FOR THE AGED, PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ETC.
 - CONTRIBUTE TO PROJECTS DONE BY THEM

OUR RESPONSE TO THE GROANING OF THE EARTH

1. BE AWARE OF THE BASIC ECOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

2.

- a. **Life is an interconnected web, not a hierarchy.**
 - b. **Nature is not a lifeless machine but a sacred living organism**
 - c. **Humans are not above nature but are part of it**
 - d. **All parts of the ecosystem have intrinsic value.**
 - e. **There is no “free lunch”.**
 - f. **Nature knows best.**
 - g. **Healthy systems maintain diversity.**
 - h. **Unity in diversity.**
 - i.
- **INITIATE SOUND ECOLOGICAL PROJECTS/ACTIONS**
 - - **ECOLOGICAL EDUCATION AND CONSCIENTIZATION**
 - **ECOLOGICAL ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM-AGAINST MINING AND LOGGING**
 - **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**
 - **“SAPAT NA” (ENOUGH) PRACTICE**
 - **ZERO WASTE MANAGEMENT-REDUCE, RECYCLE, REUSE**
 - **ORGANIC, BIO-DIVERSE FARMING**

- **COMMITMENT TO ECO-JUSTICE**
- **CREATION-CENTERED SPIRITUALITY**

- **OBSERVE EARTH-FRIENDLY PRACTICES**

- CLEANLINESSWASTE SEGREGATION.
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- TREE PLANTING
- ESTABLISHMENT OF SUSTAINABLE-BIODIVERSE FARM
- HEALTHY FOOD CAMPAIGN
- ECO-FRIENDLY CONSTRUCTION PRACTICES
- ESTABLISHMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE IN EACH INSTITUTION

CONCLUSION:

“LISTEN WITH THE EAR OF YOUR HEARTS!” “TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE , HARDEN NOT YOUR HEARTS. These are the admonitions that guide our contemplation and which spur us into prophetic action. Our Benedictine motto: ORA ET LABORA, which you are familiar with means :MYSTICS ARE PROPHETS IN CONTEMPLATION AND PROPHETS ARE MYSTICS IN ACTION!