

LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD



Teams of Our Lady

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INTRODUCTION

Listening to the Word of God links and connects each person to Christ. The Word of God is the basic spiritual food for all Christians. Father Caffarel added it to the Charter in 1977 because when he saw the upheavals society was going through, he thought that it was important to increase the demands made on Team members.

In the wording of this particular Endeavor, two terms are used: **Listening** and **the Word**. Indeed, we *listen* to God, who talks to us to save us, to communicate his life to us in abundance. His **Word** is not only written down in order to be read, but indeed in order to be received within us, in the heart of our life. As Christianity is not “a religion of the book,” but truly one of the Word of God, **the incarnate and living Word**, this Endeavor is **not merely an exercise in reading**, but indeed is an **in-depth and constant listening**.

Let us therefore take the time to **be quiet every day in order to listen to what the Lord says to us**, to each of us. This relationship with Him is the pillar of our entire spiritual life. The Word of God is not a monologue; God waits for us to respond to him with love, by putting his Word in to practice.

I. What is the origin of listening to the Word of God?

1 - Roots in the Bible

A – The Old Testament

Listening to the Word of God was already recommended in the Old Testament.

In **Deuteronomy**, we find this well-known verse, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God. The Lord is the one! And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your might. These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children [...] You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.” (Dt 6 :4- 9). This expression, “Hear, O Israel” is the theme of the whole book. It is subsequently taken up in many of the Canticles.

Samuel also said, “Speak Lord, for Your servant is listening.” (1 Sam 3: 10).



And the prophet **Amos** said, “The time is coming, says the Lord God, when I will send a famine on the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the Word of the Lord.” (Am 8:11)

B – The New Testament

Saint John’s Gospel begins with, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” (Jn1:1) and it continues “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us”. (Jn 1:14).

The Word is Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is our light. “The true Light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.” (Jn 1:9).

The example of the **Annunciation to Mary** shows that the will of God can be conveyed to us through messengers. We



need to learn how to discern and listen like Mary.

In Saint Matthew's Gospel, on Mount Tabor, when Jesus was transfigured, the Father told the three disciples who were present, *"This is My Beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him."* (Mt 17:5). Of the three phrases pronounced by the Father reported in the Gospel, this one is one of advice, a simple and unique piece of advice of a Father to his children, *"Listen to him."*

Jesus himself explains how to become one of God's children, *"My mother*

and my brothers are those who hear the Word of God and put it into practice." (Lk 8:21).

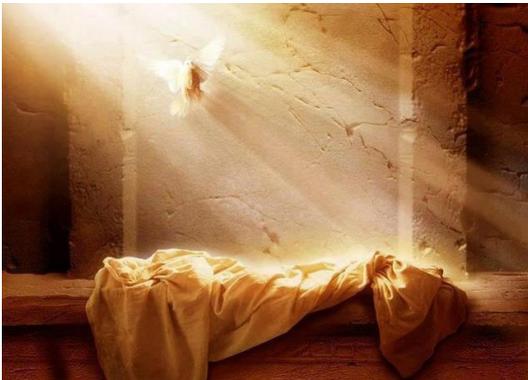
"For the Word of God is alive, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword (...)"(Heb 4:12)

"Indeed, blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it." (Lk 11:28)

There are many other calls to listen to the Word, for example in the parable of the sower, which is repeated in the Synoptic Gospels (Mt 13:18-23, Mk 4:13-20 and Lk 8:4-8). *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*

2 - Tradition

Tradition rests on the proclamation of the Kerygma (the preaching of the core message of Christianity): the great announcement of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This transmission of the faith by the apostles, after the first Easter, was initially oral.



Then in the first century it became written down, in the four Gospels, the Acts of the Apostles, the Letters and the Book of Revelation. These became part of the tradition of belief in Christ's resurrection. The Church declared these the canonical books.

At the fall of the Roman Empire, meditating on the Bible began in monasteries and convents and *Lectio Divina* appeared.



The stained-glass windows in cathedrals represented Biblical scenes and were a means of catechesis.

The Catholic Church preserved the use of the Latin (Vulgate) Bible in order to avoid the spread of different interpretations of Scripture. But preserving the Latin meant that the faithful were prevented from reading the Word of God.

Vatican Council II: recommended bible translations in different languages. (Dei Verbum, 22). It reminded us: “Sacred tradition and Sacred Scripture form one sacred deposit of the Word of God” (Dei Verbum, 10).

3 - Father Caffarel

In his book, “Les Equipes Notre-Dame. Essor et Mission des Couples Chrétiens,” Father Caffarel wrote,

“Listening to the Word of God is the second general orientation that I suggest for you. Asceticism, meaning the path to holiness, demands an active and diligent search for God, notably through the study of Scripture. But this study plays only a very weak role in couples’ personal lives, in the family’s lives, in the Team’s lives. From now on, it is important to deliberately undertake this study and we will see then the miracles that the Word of God performs, because it leads to new horizons and enables those who open themselves up to its virtues. It brings joy to the home.”

In his letters on Prayer, Father Caffarel was very insistent on listening to the Word of God and said,

“Yes, God speaks. But we need to know how to listen... God speaks to us in so many different ways.” (Nouvelles lettres sur la prière: «Un Dieu qui parle» 1975)

Moreover, this is how he defined Listening.

“Listening is not only about intelligence. Our whole being, soul and body, intelligence and heart, memory and will, must be attentive to the Word of Christ in order to open up to it, to leave space for it, to let ourselves be infused, invaded, seized by it, and completely adhere to it without holding back.” (Cahiers sur l’Oraison, decembre 1966)

And he also said, “In order to hear, perhaps we need to start by listening.” (Présence à Dieu, cent lettres sur la prière, lettre 6, 1969).

4 – Saints and Popes



Pope Benedict XVI cited **Saint Benedict** as “a master of listening to the Word of God, a profound and dedicated listening.”

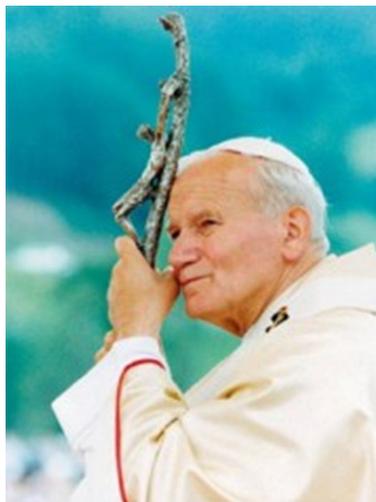
In the Prologue to the Rule, Saint Benedict wrote, “Listen carefully, my child, to your master’s precepts, and incline the ear of your heart. (...) Let us arise, then, at last, for the Scripture stirs us up, saying, “Now is the hour for us to rise from sleep.” (Rm 13:11). Let us open our eyes to the deifying light, let us hear with attentive ears the warning which the divine voice cries daily to us, “Today if you hear His voice, harden not your hearts.” (Ps 94:8)”

Indeed, the Word of God is at the heart of the Rule, written at the beginning of the 6th century and still in effect 1,500 years later.

Saint John of the Cross wrote in his *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, “For, in giving us His Son, who is His Word -- He has no other word to give us.



Saint John Paul II stressed that “Holiness remains more than ever an urgent pastoral task.” Furthermore,



“There is no doubt that this primacy of holiness and prayer is inconceivable without a renewed listening to the Word of God...It is especially necessary that listening to the Word of God becomes a life-giving encounter.”



Pope Benedict XVI has this to say:
 “In order to proclaim the Gospel we must first be nourished by the Gospel.”

“Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ” (St Jerome) “The Church does not live on herself but on the Gospel.

And in the Gospel, always and ever anew, finds the directions for her journey. This is a point that every Christian must understand and put into effect: only those who first listen to the Word can become preachers of it.

Indeed, they must not teach their own wisdom but the wisdom of God, ‘which

often appears to be foolishness in the eyes of the world’ (cf. I Cor 1: 23)”. (16 September 2005 address on 40th anniversary of Dei Verbum)



Pope Francis tells us, “The Lord always plants his Word and in exchange he asks only for an open heart to listen to it and the will to put it into practice.” Furthermore, “To listen to the Word of God and practice it”, are the only two “conditions” established by Jesus for those who want to follow him.” (Mass, 23/09/2014). The Pope also wrote, “Each word of Scripture is a gift before it is a demand.” and “[We] need to approach the word with a docile and prayerful heart.” (Evangelii gaudium, 142, 149)

II. Why listen to the Word of God?

1 – For Everyone

Because, as Christians, we wish to **deepen our knowledge and love of the Lord.**

Because listening to the Word of God allows us **to reflect Jesus in our eyes** and therefore see with his gaze.

Because **God speaks to us** in order to reveal his love and the task in life he has for each of us.

In order **to nourish each of us spiritually**, the Word of God must be venerated like the Body of the Lord.



2 – For the Couple

In order to be a **more fully Christian couple**, because listening to the Word of God opens us up even more to the Lord and to one another. Our conjugal love and our love of God thus become entwined so that our conjugal spirituality grows and supports us on the path of conversion we both undertake.



Because Father Caffarel said,

“The couple is a community of penitence, faith, hope and love. Such is the work that the Word of Christ, present and alive in the Gospel, accomplishes. (...) The couple who reads the Gospel regularly will not be long in experiencing Saint Paul’s words. “The Love of Christ urges me on”; urges me to announce the Good News to others, to share with them the spiritual riches of my life with Christ.”

(Anneau d’Or, numéro spécial 117-118)

3 – For the Team

Because **listening and meditating on the Word of God as a Team** allows us to experience what the first Christian communities experienced. “See how they love one another.” (Tertullian 2nd

Century) In this climate, hearts open to the presence of the Spirit. When we are with our Team, we offer up our concerns, difficulties, joys and deepest aspirations.

4 – For the Church

Because Father Caffarel told us,

*“The living and permanent Word of Christ “makes up “the Church.”
(Anneau d’Or, numéro spécial 117-118)*

In order to respond to **Pope Francis’ call** at the General Audience on August 26, 2015, “The Gospel read and meditated on as a family is like good bread that nourishes everyone’s heart. [...] Is there this familiarity with the Word of God in our family? Do we have the Gospel at home? Do we open it sometimes to read it together?”



III. How do we listen to the Word of God?

Listening to the Word of God is very personal and depends on each person's feelings. The following suggestions may help us to listen better in our heart, so that gradually, we allow ourselves to be transformed by the Word and to live it in our lives.

1 – How do we prepare to listen well?

* Make an appointment

Every day, make time to read the Word of God. Maybe it will be easier if you always choose the same time. Reading the Word of God first thing in the morning means that you can meditate upon it throughout the whole day.

Each person should choose the right time for them.



* Find a calm and peaceful place

In order to really listen we need to get rid of everything that might distract us, so that we can hear God's word to us and put it into practice like Mary: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me according to your word." (Lk 1:38)

This might be a prayer corner in the home. Light a candle. Settle yourself comfortably in order to be open to the Word of God.

* An empty chair beside you

can be used to symbolize Jesus' presence, sitting there and talking to you.

2 – How do we listen?

* Begin by praying to the Holy Spirit

So that He can help us to discern what the Word of God is saying to us today.

The Holy Spirit shapes this "new heart" in us and enables us to listen to



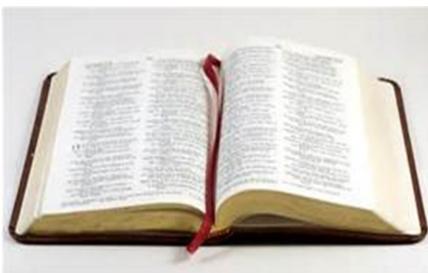
God, and accept and welcome his Word, in order to keep it in our heart, as Mary did.

* Choose a Bible Passage

It can be the gospel reading of the day, the continuous reading of a gospel, or a Biblical text chosen at random.

Monthly publications like Magnificat etc., internet sites or mobile apps can also help

Testimonial: *“One day, I was given a subscription to the magazine, “Let us Pray/Prions en Eglise. I started to read the Gospel readings daily. Gradually I came to like it and now I feel so much better when I begin my day with this reading. I admit to even setting my alarm clock ten minutes earlier in order to answer this call of God.”*



A commentary can be interesting, because “The interpreter must investigate what meaning the sacred writer intended to express, and actually expressed, in

particular circumstances by using contemporary literary forms in accordance with the situation of his own time and culture.” (Dei Verbum, 12)

* Read the Passage Slowly

If possible, read the text out loud, then silently, **letting the words penetrate your heart.**



God sends us his Word like a **love letter** that we are free to accept or not. If we do not become deeply involved in the Word of God, we simply complete an intellectual exercise. Bible study is excellent preparation for authentic listening, but **our knowledge must go deep down into our hearts**, as the Eastern mystics put it.

* What is the text saying to you?

- Objectively, what is the text talking about?
- Where does the event take place? Under what circumstances?
- Who are the characters in the text (all of them, and not just the 2 or 3 who interest me at first glance)?
- What is each character's problem? How do they act and react to resolve it?
- How does God intervene in this story?

* Ask "what does the text mean for me?" and remember it!

Writing out the biblical verse that touched us (on a piece of paper, our mobile or computer) could enable us to meditate on it during the day.

Those who want to may **write out their meditation.**

Learning a biblical passage **by heart** enables us to repeat it in different situations.

The words of certain songs are directly inspired by Biblical texts. It then becomes easier to remember the words and sing them at different moments during the day



***Pray:** any kind of listening to the Word of God sparks off private prayer

3 – A concrete example of listening to the Word of God:

by a Team Spiritual Counsellor: The disciples on the road to Emmaus (Lk 24, 13:35)

* Read the Word of God attentively

"Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked to us on the way and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" (Lk 24:32)

*What does the text itself say?

Objectively, what is it talking about?
This is the story of the Lord's appearance to two of his disciples, when he helped them understand the recent events in the

life of Jesus of Nazareth particularly, the catastrophic outcome on the cross.

Where does the event take place?

Under what circumstances? Between Jerusalem and Emmaus.

Once they arrived at Emmaus, the mysterious pilgrim pretended to want to continue on his way.

They recognized Jesus at the breaking of bread, and returned to Jerusalem in the dead of night in order to tell the others about the joy they experienced in this meeting with Jesus.

Who are the characters in the text?

- the resurrected Jesus
- the two disciples



What are the disciples' problems?

The disciples are in a state of total confusion. *"But we were hoping that it was He who was to redeem Israel."*

(Lk 24:21). They were confronted with a mysterious person, who enabled them to have a new understanding of reality. *"You foolish men! So slow to believe all that the prophets have said! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer before entering into His glory"* (Lk 24:25- 26).

What does this upheaval in their lives mean?

The disciples realize that:

- the Resurrected Lord's presence was difficult to see because they did not recognize him on the road, but only when he disappeared from their sight.
- that from now on, Scripture must be re-read using the Lord's resurrection as the key. This means understand that God's life is communicated through his son's death.
- that the burning of their hearts on the road was a gift from the Holy Spirit that enabled them to re-read all these events with a new key, and above all with authority, in order to bear witness through their own lives.
- that the living presence of the Lord is true and real within the Community as it develops. It is equally so in the Word that is read in the light of the Holy Spirit. We recognize the Lord in the "breaking of bread," (Eucharist and Sacraments).

How does God intervene in this story?

Jesus teaches them that there is another interpretation of God's action. *"And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures."* (Lk 24:27).

He encourages them to communicate to the whole world this extraordinary vision of the events and to perceive the new ways in which the resurrected Lord can be present, beginning with their own community.

* What does the text say to me?

We certainly have various preconceptions as to God's action in our lives.



We expect, perhaps, God's action in our lives to be a source of security in many areas: health, economy, family... But the events that we experience on different occasions make us question whether the Lord is always with us.

We ought therefore to re-read the Emmaus text in order to discover that it "was necessary for the Christ to suffer in order to enter His glory" and in order to

grasp the idea of God's redemptive action in our suffering.

He has appointed us as witnesses of this event which leads to salvation. He works in us through this Word, through the sacraments of the Church and through the constant presence of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.



* **Pray**, do private prayer inspired by the text

4 – A particular form of listening to the Word of God: Lectio Divina

The principles of Lectio Divina were formulated around the year 220 AD by Origen, a theologian and Father of the Church. In the 4th century, Lectio Divina was introduced to the West by **Saint**

Ambrose. Saint Augustine made it one of the fundamentals of monastic prayer. In the 6th century, Saint Benedict introduced Lectio Divina into his monastic Rule.

This “divine reading” is a slow and meditative reading of the Word of God in 4 fundamental steps:

- **Lectio:** reading.
- **Meditation:** digesting the Word, memorizing it, drawing parallels with other Biblical texts...
- **Oration:** prayer. True Lectio is a constant coming and going between reading and praying, just like the movements of breathing in and breathing out.
- **Contemplation:** Prayer of the heart





On 16th September 2005 **Pope Benedict XVI** wrote in his address to the International Congress commemorating the 40th anniversary of “Dei Verbum”,

“the diligent reading of Sacred Scripture accompanied by prayer brings about that intimate dialogue in which the person reading hears God who is speaking, and in praying, responds to him with trusting openness of heart (cf. Dei Verbum, n. 25). If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church - I am convinced of it - a new spiritual springtime. As a strong point of biblical ministry, Lectio Divina should therefore be increasingly encouraged, also through the use of new methods, carefully thought through and in step with the times. It should never be forgotten that the Word of God is a lamp for our feet and a light for our path (cf. Ps 119[118]: 105).

Finally, **Pope Francis** insists, in *Evangelii Gaudium* “This prayerful reading of the Bible is not something separate from the study undertaken by the preacher to ascertain the central message of the text; on the contrary, it should begin with that study and then go on to discern how that same message speaks to his own life.”



He explained that “A good homily, an old teacher once told me, should have “an idea, a sentiment, and an image.”

(*Evangelii Gaudium*, 152, 157)

NB: Father Caffarel stresses that the steps of Lectio Divina do not have to be adhered to rigidly when listening to the Word of God.

IV. Difficulties

1 – Physical Difficulties



Noise, lack of silence.

Tiredness, having lives that are too busy...

Interruptions hindering concentration.

Illness.

Lack of Regularity.

Stress – being burdened by life's pressures.

2 – Spiritual Obstacles

- **Discouragement** when faced with our limitations, when we don't understand what we read.
- **Laziness**, not applying the discipline, effort and time needed to listen to the Word of God



- **Distractions**, when our thoughts wander.
- **Superficial reading** of the Word, as if it were any other text, not listening with the ear of the heart.
- **A lack of religious formation** enabling an understanding of the text, which is sometimes obscure, even shocking.
- **Not being able to identify** with the characters in the text.
- **Not seeking the meaning of the text**, as if it does not apply to me.

3 – Ways of Overcoming the Difficulties



Perseverance, in regularly listening to the Word.

Seeking the help of the **Holy Spirit**.

Being **receptive and humble**, in order to welcome the Lord's message.

Create an interior silence, then use your imagination, your memory, your heart.



Believe that the Word is a **love letter** that is meant for you personally.

Follow this Endeavor and show **faithfulness** to the Teams' Charter.

Be convinced that in listening to the Word, we **meet God**.

V. The Fruits

“and the one who received the seed in rich soil is the one who hears the word and understands it; the one who yields a harvest and produces now a hundredfold, now sixty, now thirty.” (Mt 13:23)



1 – Fruits for the individual

- 1 – **Help in Discerning:** *“The word of God is something alive, and active, (...) it can slip through the place where the soul is divided from the spirit, (...) it can judge the secret emotions and thoughts.”* (Heb 4:12)
- 2 – **Richness of Life:** *“So the word that goes from My mouth; does not return to me empty, without carrying out my will and succeeding in what it was sent to do.”* (Is 55:11)
- 3 – **A Better Quality of Listening** to others, to the Magisterium of the Church, to the events of life, to our community and to ourselves...
- 4 – **An Awakening of our Heart**, by the Word, that fortifies, illuminates and warms it.

Testimonial: *“As amazing as it might seem, the power of the images in the Apocalypse, that I am currently reading, carry and uplift me in these troubled times, when world news is sometimes cruel.”*

- 5 – **A Knowledge of God’s will**, when we keep his Word in our heart, like Mary did.
- 6 – **A Greater Intimacy with God** in prayer, thanks to Lectio Divina

2 – Fruits for the couple

- 1 – An **Enlightening of our Conjugal Prayer**. As a couple, we need the nourishment of the Word in order to make us true witnesses of divine love.
- 2 – Welcoming the Lord at the beginning of our **Sit-Down**.
- 3 – Help in building up our **Conjugal Spirituality**
- 4 – **A Life more aligned with the Gospel**, whereby the accent is on love in our listening, in our relationships, in our hospitality, in our mutual forgiveness, in our service to others...

Testimonial: “Years ago, we were far from imagining that God could speak to us through the Bible. Maybe someone said as much to us, but we did not put it into practice. The Teams help us take time every day together to meditate and deepen our knowledge the Bible, by trying to make it relevant to our lives. Jesus told us in the Zacchaeus story, “...today I must stay at your house.” This word of God is a true gift for each of us and with the help of the Holy Spirit we can see more clearly and make better choices.”

3 – Fruits for the Team

1 – **The Richness of Sharing** and meditating on the Word with our Team members.

2 – **The different ways in which the Holy Spirit** touches each of us in our hearts, without altering the unity of our community.

3 – **A growing ability to hear** the Word of God more clearly among the team members

4 – **The Common Spirituality** envisaged by Father Caffarel.



5 – **A Better Understanding of what the Lord says to us**, thanks to sharing with the other Team members.

4 – Fruits for the Church

1 – **Preparation for the Eucharist** through listening to the Word at the beginning of mass.

2 – **Definition of the relationship between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit**, in order to enter into the mystery of the Trinity.



3 – **Formation of the Church community**, made up of those who listen the Word of God and put it into practice.

4- **Universal Listening to the Word** promotes unity between Christians and the communion of saints, because Christians throughout the world are called each day to read the same texts.

CONCLUSION

Yes, the Word of God is alive and active! It is endless and renewed by the Holy Spirit! Let us get into peak condition to receive it. The Word of God is miraculous. It can transform us if we ask it to.

Regular listening to the Word of God, when it truly has a place in our hearts, moves us inevitably to putting it into practice. **It nourishes all the other Endeavors:** private prayer, conjugal prayer, the sit-down, the retreat and the rule of life.

Listening to the Word of the Lord is one of the great means **for progressing on the way to holiness**, to which we are all called.

When we hold the Gospel in our hands, we need to realize that the Word made flesh dwells within it. When we listen to it, we truly hear God talking to us.

We are not here to try and seize the Word of God, but to be seized by it. Similarly, we are not here to illuminate the Word of God, but to be illuminated by it. Let us listen to it and let it illuminate our hearts and our lives! Let us relay the Word so that through us, it shines on our brothers and sisters.

Jesus himself gave us the path to happiness, **“Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it.”** (Lk 11:28)

KEY WORDS

Listening, Meditation, Silence,
Sharing, Prayer, Intimacy,
Knowledge, Love,
Putting into Practice,
Perseverance, Receptiveness,
Humility, Willpower, Faith