



## **A Call to Listen**

### **The Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment**

by Joel Stepanek

My world is filled with a lot of noise. I wake up to an alarm and almost immediately after shutting it off I thumb through my e-mail, Twitter feed, Instagram, and (maybe) Facebook. There are a lot of voices, opinions, and perspectives in the first five minutes of my day and that trend of noise continues until I finally fall asleep in the evening.

There's noise, but I rarely take time to listen.

I filter out opposing perspectives and ideas; pay attention to what I know; and even with friends and family often find myself hearing the words they say but not really listening.

As Pope Francis opened the Synod on Young People, the Faith, and Vocational Discernment, I was struck by his call to listen—to others and to the Spirit—throughout the course of the synod. He repeated this call multiple times throughout the address in various ways. He called those present to listen attentively, but also to speak courageously. He challenged us to listen to opposing views and be open to what they offer, even to the point of changing our perspective. He encouraged old and young to be in dialogue. Dialogue requires active listening.

Listening requires humility, but so does discernment, which at its heart is really listening. While the address certainly spoke to the present realities for those *at* the synod and the ways they will need to listen, be present to each other, speak boldly, and ultimately discern the will of the Spirit in the gathering, the words ring true for those of us that follow along outside the synod hall. Francis' opening address challenges us to really assess if we are working through our day in humility, listening to first the Holy Spirit and the ways that the Spirit is guiding us to greater faith, hope, and love and then to those around us.

I think about those many voices that fill my day, especially those opposing voices I filter out. I notice, both in myself and in many of my peers, that I am more likely to be combative with those voices than to actually communicate with them. Dialogue is dangerous because it presupposes that I am open to gaining something from the other person. True dialogue requires the humility to say, "My view is not perfect, and your perspective may not only add

something to mine, but may actually change it.” Conversely, in order to enter into dialogue, I need to be able to believe the same about the person I am in a conversation with. Both people need to be open to receive and listen to what the other will speak without first discounting the words before they are spoken.

I think that is the power in the opening address from the synod—it allows each of us to reconsider the ways we listen (or fail to listen) and the impact that humble listening can have on each of us. In a world filled with noise, taking time to simply step back and truly listen may be the key to not only becoming more in tune with the Spirit, but also in reconciling with our neighbor, embracing the other, and becoming Christ in a world that desires to find him.

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