

## ***Listening with Patience (Week 2)***

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*"Mary...sat at Jesus' feet and listened to what He said" (Luke 10:39).*

### **1. Why do we complain?**

Have you ever tried going a whole day without complaining?

It's not as easy as it sounds.

Complaints come in all shapes and sizes.

They can slip off our tongue with ease, and w/great frequency, because we have *strong* thoughts and opinions.

Of course, some of our complaints are perfectly legitimate...

- we see things that aren't right, injustices that should be fixed

But a good portion of our daily complaints are triggered by things like

- impatience
- annoyance
- or because we're tired, or too busy, or have a lot on our mind
- or because we're worried or upset about something

Some of you may remember,

...the book, "A Complaint Free World" published in 2007

- a challenge to get through a day (or longer) without complaining
- help you do this, wear a bracelet (switch if you caught yourself complaining)
- goal was not to eliminate complaining

but raise level of awareness of what we complain about, when, etc.!

Why do we complain?

The Children of Israel did it a lot - they murmured and grumbled and complained to Moses as they adjusted to life in the wilderness,

as they slowly weaned themselves off the mistaken belief that life back in Egypt would be better  
- than the Lord's promise of freedom.

Spiritually speaking, our complaints (discontent) originate in a grand battle that's taking place in our spirit

- it's a battle between two worlds - this world of time & space, & the spiritual realm of our mind that's removed from time and space
- it's a battle between our old self & new
- between what we *know* we should be doing  
...but don't WANT to do, put off for another day...

But our discontent goes even deeper than that.

Like Martha, we complain

We express frustration and annoyance, not over frivolous things, but serious issues, things we really care about.

As followers of the Lord, we try to go about our lives doing the right thing and yet we find that we're not peaceful, not happy, not content...

Something is missing.

We are, as the Lord said to Martha, "*worried and troubled about many things...*" (v. 41).

## **2. Let's Examine Martha's Complaint**

Martha complains to the Lord about Mary. "*Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her to help me...*" (Luke 10:40).

The Lord responds to Martha by saying that Mary is doing something that she isn't - *listening*.

What a curious answer.

Could learning how to *listen* really be the answer to our discontent?

Well, let's look deeper at Martha's complaint.

- she was doing a good thing - getting a meal ready for an important Guest
- nothing wrong with that
- and she wanted her sister, Mary to help with this important work
- again, nothing wrong with asking for help

But if Martha was doing a good thing (which she was), why was she still unhappy?

Wasn't serving the Lord in this way enough?

Wasn't that the "reward?"

All she needed to be happy and content?

Well, as we move through the correspondences of this story, we find out that it's by *patiently* sitting at the Lord's feet, and learning to really listen to what the Lord is saying in His Word...

that we discover the truth about

- ourselves
- our motivations, why we do what we do
- and what it is that will make us truly happy

### **3. What does Mary "sitting at the Lord's feet" represent?**

Mary's actions represent spending time with the Lord in His Word.

When we do this, we become better listeners.

We "hear" the Lord in new ways.

Our mind is opened to the realm of *motivation* - why we do what we do.

**The "good part" that Mary had chosen is the realization that all our acts of service need to be, not for the sake of ourselves, but for the sake of the Lord and our neighbor.**

[PAUSE] the concept/doctrine in the New Church that the uses we engage in, our daily work/attitude/focus, is what we'll be doing in the next life.

Point? A life of use, useful service, is the *source* of joy, of happiness, in this world and the next.

*"The whole of heaven, in short, is nothing but a world of useful service...what is useful service but love of the neighbor in act? And what holds heaven together except this love?" (CL 266).*

*"What, then, is heavenly joy? It is the pleasure of doing something that is of use to oneself and to others...The pleasure in being useful...is the life and soul of all heavenly joys." (CL 5).*

Think of the things you have chosen to do in your life...

- your paid job
- your volunteer work, helping others
- raising children
- your hobbies, interests, etc.
- spending time with family and friends

When we say, of the things we do...

*"I'm doing this for the Lord."*

*"I'm doing this for my neighbor."*

**We're declaring our intention, our motive, our reason for why we do what we do. We're doing it for the greater good, for the sake of society, for the country, the church.**

**In other words, we do it for a cause greater than ourselves!**

It frees us of resentment, annoyance

It opens the door to the true purpose of our lives here on earth

This is the part that Martha didn't understand/was missing.

- she didn't realize that she was already doing what would make her truly happy (serving the Lord and her neighbor)

- the real joy and satisfaction of our work comes in thinking how we are helping/serving others, not worrying about whether or not we're getting recognized/getting a fair deal, etc.

So the **1st step** in becoming a better listener is spending time w/the Lord in His Word (this will help calm our spirit, better align our purposes w/the Lord's purposes).

The **2nd step** is to put our newly acquired "listening skills" into practice by working on becoming a better listener with the people in our lives.

#### **4. Listening is a conscious act (can't do it by accident)**

*\*\*I remember being told years ago that if I practiced "active listening," deep listening w/someone, and if I did it uninterrupted for 30 mins, I would be physically exhausted afterwards\*\**

The point is we can't *truly* listen to another person...

- while doing something else

- while being "selective" in what we choose to listen to (or not listen to)

Deep listening, good listening, is a conscious, deliberate act.

It takes dedication, intentionality.

Think of the "barriers" to good listening...

When trying to listen to a loved one or friend or neighbor off the street...

we might:

- be pre-occupied (thinking about something else)
- feel that we're too busy (don't have time for this)
- not really interested in listening

In our reading today, we learned that...

\*\*Side note - interesting that the Lord often says, "He who has ears to ear, let him hear" but doesn't (as far as I'm aware) say the same thing about seeing. Why? I think it's because "listening" is harder to do...

"Seeing" and "listening" utilize the same thought process.

When we "see" something, we grasp it with our understanding.

When we "hear" something, we likewise grasp it with our understanding,

but hearing takes it one step further - we will what we see.

*"The sense of hearing convinces people that a thing is true, for it has an influence not only on the understanding part of the mind but also on the will part, and so reaches more interiorly. It reaches the will and causes people to will what they see" (AC 3869).*

Listening is an act of will - put bluntly, we won't do it if we don't want to.

It's based on the assumption that we are prepared to temporarily rise above our own wants and needs so that we can give our full attention to the Lord and our neighbor.

## **5. Choosing that "good part."**

*"Martha, Martha, you are worried and troubled about many things. But one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part..." (v. 42).*

Let us, like Mary, chose that good part.

In listening to others, it's not about winning an argument or even agreeing with them.

It's about giving, unselfishly of ourselves.

In a world that can't stop talking, there's something very precious, very rare, when someone stops to listen to us.

So let's try to do our part in lending a listening ear...

...in giving people a chance to be heard.

**AMEN.**

Lessons: Luke 10:58-42; AC 3927, AC 3869.