

# Along the track

## Listen

When one of my granddaughters came home on her first day at school, her mother unpacked her bag. "You haven't eaten your lunch!" The teacher said: "Eat your fruit at lunch." So she did. Nothing else, just the fruit.

There are two messages to consider, the trust shown to the teacher and the obedience. Obedience is a virtue, that's true but perhaps in this case that may be taking it a little too far. Obedience does not mean just following orders, or completely surrendering our freedom but rather opening ourselves up to greater possibilities. Obedience, from the Latin *obedire*, means "listen". St Benedict added a further dimension: "Listen carefully, my daughters and sons, to my instructions, and attend to them with the ear of your heart".

Just after the Spirit descends on Jesus after he was baptised by John, Jesus talks about this right at the start of his public life. A change of mind and heart or metanoia is one of the first words Jesus is recorded as saying. Mark writes: "This is the time of fulfillment. The reign of God is at hand! Repent (metanoia), and believe this Good News!" (Mark 1:15) Metanoia is a rich and beautiful concept.

Metanoia is made up of two Greek words: "meta" which means, "beyond" and "noos" which means "mind." Metanoia is an invitation to move beyond your current way of thinking and to embrace new ways of thinking and living. At this dawn of a new era with the coming of Jesus, that was a mighty challenge to his listeners. And it still is for us today. Many did not want to hear it. Some don't today either. Later on, Jesus asks his disciples to evaluate the quality of their listening. "Consider carefully how you listen" (Lk 8:18). Only those who receive the word with an "honest and good" heart and keep it faithfully bear the fruit of life and salvation (Lk 8:15).

Have you ever noticed that the English word "repent" is usually followed by some dire warning? Repent or else something terrible is going to happen to you! Repent is usually used to foster fear and control rather than a change of mind and heart. Jesus didn't use it that way.

Obedience is not just about following rules, it is about being open to allowing our hearts to be changed. And that's hard. Obeying rules is easier. Being open is about the courage to listen to the Spirit in the myriad

ways the Spirit speaks and calls to us. The original sin described in Genesis One (coincidentally also about fruit) is about disobedience, about the need to be in total control, about an obsession with our own omnipotence. Obedience, on the other hand, helps us to learn that it's all right for us not to know everything. Instead, listening with the ear of the heart enables us to appreciate that we can depend on the insights of others to carry us through life at the same time we are trying to carry them through life. We too have something to offer. By being willing to learn from the experience of others, we come to respect the value of those whose insights challenge, stretch, improve and extend our own. And vice versa.

So Jesus' second message, which quickly follows the first about metanoia is about trust: Do not be afraid, he says and he repeats that over and over again. It is not a new message. "Do not be afraid," appears 366 times in the Bible. As they say in Ireland, "366 times, that's once for every day of the year and once for no reason at all."

That is at the heart of synodality – being willing to trust in the Spirit and being willing to listen deeply to one another, without fear but with openness to others' ideas, others' ways of seeing and believing. It is also about listening with our hearts to the cry of our earth, our common home.

So we are called to metanoia, to move beyond fear, to think new thoughts and treasure the old. "This is the time of fulfillment. The reign of God is at hand!" That is within our grasp, through our actions, and our minds, and our dreams, beyond our fear. That is what Jesus repeated over and over again by word and in his actions, even to death.

Let's give the last word to Jesus as told by Luke. "So pay attention to how you hear. To those who listen to my teaching, more understanding will be given. But for those who are not listening, even what they think they understand will be taken away from them." (Luke 8:18)

Where do you sit?

Regards  
Jim Quillinan

Email: [jquillinan@dcsi.net.au](mailto:jquillinan@dcsi.net.au)