

## GLIMPSE

### Stop, Listen and Listen

Fr. Larry Gillick, S.J.

Here's something I've been observing and pondering. Conversation is either a *context* or a *contest*. Recent sociological studies came up with the number of words we use in whatever a normal day is. Sixteen thousand words are verbally produced each day by each of us! There have been no studies about just how many words we listen to. To how many of your own words do you really listen? Hmm.

One enjoyable pastime is picking up on airplane conversations/contests around my seat area. Parents/grandparents relating the exploits/achievements of their precious-ones can easily move from sharing to checkering to chassing, to one-upping, to who's going to trump last before having to put our tray-tables back in their upright position for landing. Sometimes I expect the Flight Attendant to add, "While making sure your seat belts are clasped take off your earphones which have prevented you from really listening!" I feel rather sorry, because both contestants were losers. They didn't miss their flights, but they did miss each other.

The true nature of conversation is as a context for *conversion for both conversants*. The vast majority of humans are walking around looking for and hoping for someone who will really listen to them. I mean that! My parents would go on trips all around the country. My father marveled at how often strangers would start talking with my mother while my father was charging onward down the street to find some delicious candy or pastry shop. He would often enter and make purchases to share with his "Favorite Girlfriend" and then retrace his steps to find some stranger purchasing delicious time and attention from my favorite mother. I think she learned to listen well, because my father was such a good talker, but conversion was another topic.

In our Theology studies we learned a cute phrase, "The word is absurd unless it is heard." The word must be spoken and really gets its power and meaning by not only being heard, but listened to. We learn to speak quite quickly, but learning to listen

and allowing what we hear to touch, change, create, and convert us seems to be a life-long process. The major conversions in our lives have come from our being met by the persons whose words were more than verbal. They were the spirit-actions which are louder and deeper than mere words.

The way the Gospels reveal Jesus, He spoke more than sixteen thousand words each of His public days. Was He a good listener? He was certainly moved by what He heard and people came to Him hoping He would really listen. His teachings in words are very good and insightful, and as we playfully say, "I think He had some good ideas with which I fully agree." Our basic conversion is not because of His exact words and teachings, but because of how He lived His spirit-actions which remained louder than words. He knew Who He was and was available for listening and hearing everyone and anything.

When we know who we are, we know that we are always in the process of being changed, created, converted and so we will desire strongly to listen and watch and receive, like my street-listening mother. She never seemed to stop growing deeper and maybe that is what conversion through true conversation results in. We change from thinking we know who we are, to becoming who we will be if we listen uncontestedly.

It is only a glimpse, keep counting the words to which you really listen.