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Listening Pt. I

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Listening

We hear, to the degree that we are blessed with hearing, but we do not always listen to what we hear. We pay no attention to background noise from the street or to sounds that come to us from indoor or outdoor environments, except when they have a particular relevance for us. At times, we might listen for and hear the sounds of an opening door, because we expect a person to enter, or to some unusual noise coming from our car or within our office or home, precisely because those sounds might convey some useful information.

In conversations, including those with God that we might call "prayer," listening might require more effort than speaking and also provide us with greater benefits than we could hope to receive by using words. Especially in prayer, but also in most human dialogs, we are "heard" even when we do not speak; we both receive and give much of the regard we have for one another, including unarticulated but important information such as openness and attentiveness, without using words – another form of listening.

Hearing is usually automatic, while listening is definitely a conscious, ongoing choice that admits of various levels of intention and intensity, depending upon the thoughts and feelings that are elicited within us as we listen. Someone might find it quite difficult to receive a compliment, while another person is almost unable to accept even a small, graciously worded criticism. At one time in our lives we might be almost shocked by a self-revelation we receive from a friend, and at another time, not at all. At the moment of first hearing a particular piece of information we might feel disturbance within us, but decide to give no indication of our reaction, and continue listening with the same level of attention as before.

Our hearing might diminish with age, without our having any choice in the matter. But how we listen continues to improve through life, depending upon the degree of our desire to progress. As we become better at listening, we find that our comprehension of what is spoken improves somewhat, but, more significantly, our acceptance of and appreciation for those to whom we listen broadens and deepens. Our love for those whom God loves (besides ourselves) becomes ever more important to us, under the influence of the active presence of the Spirit.

God has been referred to as "The Listener," based on the experiences of all of us who have become aware that when we pray, we are not "talking to ourselves," and that we receive consoling support even without the kinds of visual and audible cues that we usually are given in most human conversations. One of the normal consequences of being heard is that we

are far more likely to find that we want to become better listeners ourselves. Especially for those of us who have had positive encounters with “The Listener,” we find it natural to ask that we might grow in the desire to listen well to what we hear in all our conversations.

Listening is a gift that we receive, and that we then give to others.