



FAITH: A *FRESH TAKE*



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The Scary Reality of Silence

As a mother of teenagers, I am no stranger to noise. In fact, most of my parenting life I have resisted the urge to put on headphones numerous times to drown out the loud music, the bouncing voices of my kids' friends in the house and at times, the bickering between my son and my daughter.



However, now that my children are gaining independence and coming into their own, the noise level has reduced drastically. In fact, the silence is almost deafening as they retreat to their rooms or leave to go hang out with their friends. And, ironically, I've struggled with the silence.

At first, I retreated into my own corner to sulk and resist the silence in my home. And then, I took it personally that my teenagers preferred the company of social media, video games or televisions in the privacy of their own rooms. I struggled to accept that the silence was an opportunity for me to embrace.

Silence is sometimes a gift to us all. When we tear ourselves away from the hustle and bustle of busy schedules, carpooling, rushing about and running late to our next commitment, we find that silence can be a powerful resource.

When the house is silent, I use this time to reflect upon my day, clear my head and even brainstorm ideas for writing projects or teaching assignments.

I've learned to rely less on the comfort of the noise and soak in the silence as a sign that maybe this is my reward for parenting noisy children all of these years.

Silence is scary and it can feel alarming and energizing at the same time. It forces us to look at the reality of our lives and contemplate our next journey of faith. But, the silence helps me to appreciate those moments when my teenagers retreat from their rooms and join me at the dinner table or just sit on the couch next to me without saying a word.

The silence has helped me see that my children are no longer children. Soon, the house will be empty. This segway into our lives as empty nesters may be a blessing and God's way of preparing us for lives as parents of adults. Although I may not always appreciate the stillness of my home when my kids are away or busy, I do appreciate the many years the noise made me smile and want to tear my hair out at the same time.

— Shannon Philpott

Shannon Philpott is a freelance writer and college journalism instructor, but most of all a mother of two teens. You can see her work at www.shannonphilpott.com.



CNS/L'Osservatore Romano

ANNIVERSARY: Pope Francis speaks as he celebrates Mass with about 50 cardinals in the Pauline Chapel of the Apostolic Palace at the Vatican June 27. The Mass marked the pope's 25th anniversary of his ordination as a bishop.

Are We (Really) Listening?

I always hope to have a real-world example to go along with the subject I write about in this column. As I type this, I am alternating between the need to laugh and the temptation to cry (or, at least, furl my brow and shake my head).



The reason? A just-fresh experience that illustrates a sad-but-true reality: We often miss

the meaning of what someone has said by a very wide margin.

I had ordered a skirt from a reputable clothing store. When it came, it was too big. I returned it and asked for a smaller size. It arrived, but it was still way too big. So, I called the customer service number and explained my problem.

"Maybe it was mislabeled," I said. "But whatever the reason, it doesn't rest at the waist – it's nearly down to my hips. Is the skirt designed that way?"

"Well," said the very friendly rep, "it shouldn't rest that high up. Our other styles don't."

"You mean, that low?" I said. "It's at least three inches below the waist."

"Right," said the rep. "It shouldn't be that high up. Maybe there's something wrong."

I then referred to the picture of the model wearing the skirt. It looked as if her version fit properly. I imagined mine wrapping around my knees. I tried again.

I said, "The skirt I have here is near the hips. It (the picture) looks like it should be at the waist."

"Right," he said, again. "It should be lower than the one you have."

Oh, dear.

"The waist is higher than the hips," I said, trying to be patient. "Shouldn't the skirt be at the waist?"

"Well, yes. It should ... oh!" There was a pause. "You're right."

Listening is a crucial skill at work, worship and in our everyday relationships. In 1957, researchers at the University of Minnesota studied the

listening ability of students and working professionals. They concluded that the average person only remembers half of what he or she hears after listening to someone talk.

With all the technological help we have at our disposal today, have we improved since the 1950s? Alas, no.

According to statistics compiled by the International Listening Association, a variety of more recent studies indicate that, although we spend between 24 percent to 55 percent of our time each day in listening, most of us recall only 17 percent to 25 percent of what we have heard.

Despite the statistics, however, the situation is not hopeless. With effort, we can become better listeners. One way is to engage other senses. Awareness of visual cues, vocal tone, time and place help pin down the content of what we hear.

Focus is key. According to the International Listening Association data, more than 50 percent of meaning is carried nonverbally. Eye contact helps comprehension (and is more respectful than keeping our gaze on our cellphones!).

Health can affect how well we listen. Hearing loss or other challenges can make it difficult to take in aural information. An emotional or psychological unwillingness to engage in conversation can keep us from truly hearing what someone is saying to us. Addressing these issues can make us better listeners.

Sometimes we are too tired, frazzled or nervous to understand fully. But if we have more patience and nurture comprehension in "smaller" conversations, we can build listening skills for those important talks with loved ones or coworkers, or even times when we crave understanding in prayer or worship.

Yes, the more we strive to listen, the less our words will, er, go to waist ... (Sorry, couldn't resist!)

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— Maureen Pratt

(This column is part of the CNS columns package.)



CNS/CERILLO EBRANO, EPA

PHILIPPINES WAR: Government forces of the Philippines patrol a street in Pigcawayan June 22. Father Teresito Soganub, vicar general of the Prelature of Marawi, was seen alive June 25 during a "humanitarian pause" in the conflict.

Fresh Take: a way to look at faith from a different perspective

This is an online-only page dedicated to young adult Catholics, their interests, their needs, their challenges and their faith.

We want to give young adults something to "chew on," to think about when they're looking for something more than an on-line horoscope or the

latest star news.

This page offers columns we believe will interest our young adults. Let us know.

Email us at cathnews@bellevillemessenger.org with questions, suggestions or for more information.

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