Opinion
Letters to the Editor



by NCR Staff

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In his column "View from the Vatican," NCR Vatican correspondent Christopher White wrote: It was less than two weeks into the synod on synodality when multiple reports emerged about participating delegates storming out of the room. Tensions, it seems, are part of the synod process. Following are NCR reader responses to this column with letters that have been edited for length and clarity.

"Listening" is a world away from "dictating," even from merely "hearing."

For me it brings to mind the principle within the "Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius" that urges participants to place themselves within the ambit of the scriptural scene they are meditating upon. What I see and feel and learn in that process has evolved over the years.

Contemplating the life of Jesus by recorded word and "being there" within that Ignatian context — as a reasonably intelligent person — informs me that few if any followers would have stayed with Jesus if he did not listen. They were reasonably intelligent. They had jobs and families to return to. They would not be "talked down to." Jesus listened as much as he taught. He was questioned, challenged. He addressed them; he learned.

Really good teachers become so by experience, reflection and internalization. That is how they become "inculcators" of learning rather than mere "preachers."

I wonder why so many of his "ministers" have difficulty with listening. I suspect that it might be who they really, really listen to.

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No one should be surprised by the negative reactions of some clerics to the idea that they are equal to laity and non-ordained religious in their meetings at the synod. The bishops from the United States in particular are accustomed to being seen in a

shepherd and sheep relationship. Sheep follow without question. The idea that the laity have important views and the bishops need to listen is to some a bridge too far.

The bishops most affected are the ones who prefer the church as they recall it was before the 1960s, when clericalism was the accepted posture of the clergy and many of the faithful were obsequious in their submission to pastors and bishops. The opening of the church, mostly through the Second Vatican Council, but more recently under the reign of Pope Francis, has changed that paradigm. However, it remains to be seen if the synod will result in the ability of the laity to speak to the hierarchy and have those prelates listen with an open mind.

I would like to think that most of the prelates listened to those in their groups who were not clergy and learned something. The nature of the encounters, wherein everyone needed to reflect silently on what others said, is a good indicator that no one reacted spontaneously to arguments they did not want to hear. This would be a good change to the parish level wherein parishioners speak freely and without interruption from either their peers or the clergy. Perhaps then we will see emerge a church which reflects the influence of the spirit in all of us.

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Rather than Pope Francis asking Synod participants not to reveal details to the press, he should have made a special request of the clergy — especially bishops. "Check your ego at the door!" Bishops wield too much power with too few natural abilities to do it properly.

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