



Reinvigorating Christian Faith through Listening

By Dr. Rohan Cherian Thomas

Justice KT Thomas addressed a gathering of District Judges in the year 2000, as a sitting judge of the Supreme Court of India. He advised them to be attentive when a lawyer was presenting her arguments. If a judge were to 'switch-off' for even five minutes, he could miss the lawyer's best point. This could no doubt lead to grave injustice.

Judges are fine people to emulate. By nature of their duty, their character should be above reproach. Litigants who are mere strangers approach the judge, seeking her intervention in settling their disputes. They trust the judge.

Just like every other person, judges too are products of their social environment. No one escapes the vicissitudes of life. The same society which produces criminals also produces judges. There are a host of factors which swing the pendulum in either direction. One of these factors is one's faith.

Christian faith teaches us to love one another and to be compassionate. Justice Thomas' advice reflects the effect of this faith on his duties as a judge.

To pay attention is the difference between hearing and listening. It is impossible to listen, if bias clouds our attention. The speaker's clothes, color of his skin, gender, style of speaking and grammatical errors, are all immaterial. It is the message which must register in our minds. Any bias may lead to 'switching-off' or in some cases, even worse, to misunderstanding the message.

To love a person is to remove our bias. After all, love is unconditional. To listen is to treat the speaker with dignity.



Reinvigorating Christian Faith through Listening By Dr. Rohan Cherian Thomas

In many cases, both litigants may have suffered. The range of suffering may be disproportionate. Judges deploy equity in such cases. Just because one litigant has suffered more does not mean that a decision would be made entirely in his favor. A balanced remedy is met on the anvil of fairness and justice. The foundation of equity is formed by compassion. In some cases, only one litigant may have suffered. In such matters, compassion would require a decision which is entirely in his favor. In personal relationships, compassion is shown through compromise and sacrifice.

The simple act of listening is, therefore, a testament of our Christian faith. It is applicable in any kind of relationship; parent-child, husband-wife, employer-employee, teacher-student or judge-litigant. We display our love and compassion by understanding the other person. Applying listening in personal relationships can be more difficult, as unlike judges and litigants, the parties in such relationships know each other. Their history of interaction can place a deep-rooted bias. Removing this bias can be a tough challenge. It is for this reason that judges recuse themselves from cases where they know the litigant personally.

After having understood the message, the judge delivers his judgement with no room for ambiguity. Justice is delivered. Our response can be a measure of whether we have 'switched-off' or listened.

Birth is life-affirming. Every year, the birth of Christ marks our affirmation to the Christian faith with renewed vigor. A District Judge on account of his youth may lack perfection in listening. It's his dedication to improve himself, case after case,



Reinvigorating Christian Faith through Listening **By Dr. Rohan Cherian Thomas**

year after year, that he fine-tunes this skill. One day he may become a Supreme Court Judge. This Christmas, may we strengthen our relationships, heal broken ones and find remedies in our professional life through listening.

Recently, former Chief Justice of India, Justice UU Lalit, said of Justice KT Thomas – ‘what would always stand out was his clarity of thought, the strength and courage of conviction, and his great sense of compassion’.

Our faith speaks through our actions.

Merry Christmas. May God bless us all.

Dr. Rohan Cherian Thomas