

# Visiting L.A. Congress 2016

## Listening in love, basking in mercy

BY BERYL AND STEVE SCHEWE  
SPECIAL TO THE TIDINGS

The Religious Education Congress of the Los Angeles Archdiocese was a sunburst of sensation for two Minnesotans freshly arrived from winter. Visiting L.A. Congress for the first time, we soaked up the experience of 37,000 people in renewal during this Year of Mercy: beautiful liturgies and prayer services; soulful music; thoughtful speeches and talks; and friendly, welcoming people.

We are grateful for how so much evident hard work translated into spiritual benefits that flowed beyond the local dioceses. We were also impressed by how many of the talks we heard emphasized the importance of listening, when as Americans we so often talk past each other. It's impossible to do justice to the many fabulous speakers at the Congress, so we've highlighted a few.

Sister Helen Prejean, C.S.J., keynote speaker and advocate for an end to capital punishment, described herself as a listener and storyteller for the condemned, and for the families of the victims. In a year when the state of California will vote on whether to continue the

death penalty, her call to action blended wisdom of the Fathers and a contemporary call to action.

She quoted St. Basil's remark that "Annunciations are frequent; Incarnations are rare," and she prayed that her stories would cause "God's word to come to fruit in us, and that we will act on what we hear."

Professor Richard Gaillardetz outlined the contribution that Pope Francis is making to the Vatican II renewal as part of the dynamic, living reality of the Church traveling through history. Echoing Sister Helen, he traced the importance of the Church traveling from the centers of leadership to listen to voices at the margins of society.

Gaillardetz described how Pope Francis has listened and witnessed this way by example, most recently during his visits to the indigenous people of Chiapas and to the U.S./Mexico border at Ciudad Juárez. In his desire for Catholics to be a Synodal Church, a Church on the way, Francis has proclaimed that we must be a listening Church at every level.

Pope Francis recognized that even though listening in synods can be a painstaking, exhausting experience, "Even when they may proceed with

fatigue, they must be understood as occasions of listening and sharing." Gaillardetz concluded that Francis has "expanded what authoritative teaching looks like" in the age of social media, modeling conversations on the papal airplane that are "occasional, dialogical, and provisional," as the pope shares his thoughts and invites listening on issues from immigration to responding to the Zika virus.

The conference speakers spanned the concerns of the Church, from existential challenges of peoples and communities on the margins (like the Mayans in Chiapas) to the pain of individual grievers.

Amy Florian spoke about listening to those who mourn. She urged us to invite stories by asking open-ended questions that draw out the emotions of grievers and help them to seek comfort. Drawing on her extensive work with grievers and her personal grief experience, Florian offered practical advice for honoring the unique experience of every griever.

In his talk on the second stage of spirituality, Father Ron Rolheiser, OMI, broke open Scripture and argued for the imperative of growing into a new maturity in our culture. Making the point that "Scripture is not to be admired, but

imitated," he offered that hearing Scripture at different times in our lives makes a great difference in how we perceive meaning.

Our listening in the stages of life is fundamental to sensing what or who in our lives is "radically missing." Like the woman who lost one of her 10 coins, or the shepherd whose hundredth sheep strays, he encouraged us to seek out our missing pieces so that we, our families, our churches, and our communities can return to wholeness.

Father Rolheiser challenged us to be "water purifiers" for negative energy, accepting and purifying rather than retransmitting negative energy to others. Finally, Father Rolheiser described the image of Mary standing under the cross as one of receiving the anger, bitterness and violence of the crucifixion, yet reflecting back only strength, dignity and love.

We are grateful for your welcome and we look forward to returning in 2017. ■

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## The 'L' Word: Lent

BY ASHLEY LANUZA

ST. GABRIEL MISSION HIGH SCHOOL

As a child, I thought Lent was a time to stop eating chips or chocolate and start helping mom with the chores. It meant that the Church was colored up-and-down with purple fabric, and that 40 was the most important number.

However, that is simply the surface idea of Lent. For those of you who aren't quite sure what Lent is, it is a Christian holiday lasting for 40 days and 40 nights, from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday.

Lent is a time for reflection, a journey into understanding one's self to become a better person. It is a preparation for Jesus' sacrifice at his crucifixion, where we are granted forgiveness and a promise for God's kingdom. However, how can you live out Lent?

Lent is like a quarter check-up New Year's resolution. You work hard to do things you should do, and stop doing things you shouldn't. Making a list of activities or skills that you want to improve on, for instance, are great ways to learn more about yourself and better yourself this season.

In my freshman year of high school, I had made a poster reminding me of what I wanted to work on. At the time, I felt I had lost my "creative" side, so I set up time to make something creative, whether it was a candle holder or a short story.

The activity brightened my day, forced me to self-reflect, and reminded me of

my skills and talents. Lent may require a lot of planning, but if it is something you enjoy and you know is good for you, then there isn't anything wrong in placing your entire being into it.

During this season, we are also told to make sacrifices. One of the most infamous Lenten concepts is not eating meat on Fridays. However, why do we abstain from the carnage of mammals and birds? According to [bulldogcatholic.org](http://bulldogcatholic.org), we abstain from meat to express obedience for God's will as described through the Church.

In showing that we obey the Church, we also express how much we love God to make a small sacrifice in return for God sacrificing his only Son. We give up meat specifically because it used to be associated with luxurious feasts.

Fish is an exception to this rule because, during ancient times, fish wasn't seen as a luxury meal. Our abstinence from pork, beef, lamb, chicken and other poultry and meats is perceived as a sweet sacrifice and an act of love. This year, keep in mind that it is a time of self-reflection and self-improvement.

Do not lose sight of whatever it is you choose to accomplish this season, whether it's getting better at a talent or giving up on something toxic. May the Lenten season be with you! ■

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