

V1_24th_after_Pentecost= The Loquacious Tongue

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U.I.O.G.D.

Ave Maria!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, we love Thee, save souls

O God come to our assistance. Jesus, Mary, Joseph please make haste to help us!

+ + + Jesus, Mary, Joseph + + +

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TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Loquacious Tongue

“Blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it.” St. Luke 11: 28.

Indeed, blessed are they who hear the Word of God in sermons, and keep it in their hearts and act and live according to it! Blessed are they who learn, know and fulfill the law and the holy will of God. And may we not add: Blessed are they who hear the word of their neighbor, and keep it? They who hear secrets and do not divulge them? For on silence in these matters a great deal depends, and the neglect of it occasions much evil and mischief. But how few are there, even amongst Christians, who deserve to be called blessed on that account! How many talkative people there are who commit even grievous sin by revealing secrets! And of those who unnecessarily reveal secrets I intend to speak to-day, by asking and answering the following three questions:

I. Who are those people?

II. What mischief do they?

III. How grievously do they sin against God and their neighbor?

I. The secrets of a man's heart belong to him more completely than anything else in this world, for, after God, he is the absolute and uncontrolled master of them. He can say that his money belongs to him, yet not in such a way that it cannot be stolen or lost. His house belongs to him; but it may be destroyed by fire. He possesses his good name; but that may be torn to pieces, and he is often compelled to bear patiently the calumnies and backbiting of slanderous and uncharitable tongues. His bodily health, strength, and beauty are subject to countless weaknesses and maladies; his memory and understanding become dulled by age; his sight, hearing, and other senses grow less keen as he advances in life. Any exterior actions that he performs alone and in secret, he cannot keep from the knowledge of the Angels and the demons. The secrets of his heart are the only things that belong to him so completely that no creature in heaven, on earth, or under the earth can deprive him of them, or make them known against his will. No demon of hell, no angel of heaven can find out our secret thoughts and knowledge, unless the Creator himself reveals them, or unless they can be suspected from outward signs.

This is the knowledge which God, who calls himself “the searcher of hearts,” has kept to himself so strictly that he does not reveal the secrets of the human heart even to his dearest friends, or to the Angels, the princes of heaven. And this he does in order to show us how strict is the obligation he places on every one of keeping the secrets entrusted to him, and that, if this obligation is violated, the sin committed is to be attributed to nothing but the willful, mischievous loquacity of the person who violates it.

And, in fact, the well-being of the human race requires that a strong safeguard should be placed on the hearts and minds of men, and that there should be a strict obligation not to divulge the secrets entrusted to one’s keeping. For if we could read each other’s thoughts, or if we were allowed to speak freely of the secrets committed to us, what disorder there would be in the world! What would become of mutual confidence and fidelity, of honesty, of Christian charity, of justice, of friendship and intimacy? All these would disappear at once. Hence, the Scripture says: “Open not thy heart to every man, lest he repay thee with an evil turn and speak reproachfully to thee.” You must not speak to every one concerning what it would be lawful for you to speak of; how much more, then, are you not bound to keep a strict silence about what you are not allowed to disclose to others? Every one should keep those words of the prophet Isaias constantly before his mind: “My secret to myself, my secret to myself.”

Now, what God guards so carefully, what the law of charity and justice and the common weal of the human race require to be kept strictly secret, is published by those talkative people who do not know how to keep their tongues in check. And the chief of these are they who, when they are entrusted with a secret by a well-meaning friend, or are asked in confidence for advice, or have otherwise managed to find out their neighbor’s secrets, go and tell what they have heard or learned to the other person concerned. So and so, they say, has said this of you; you think he is a good friend of yours, but you are mistaken; he told me in confidence how he means to act toward you. Or, I happened to find it out by chance; do not let on that you heard anything from me; I could not keep silent any longer about it, and felt obliged to tell you the fearful things that so and so says of you; see that you do not allow him to get the better of you. In the same way they sometimes carry back to the former what the latter has told them. Such tale-bearers and scandal-mongers have always an evil name in a community, for they sow discord between friends and neighbors, brothers and sisters, parents and children, husbands and wives; and they give rise to secret enmities, hatreds, and envy. People who were formerly on the best of terms refuse to speak to each other, and nourish desires of revenge against each other, without knowing what it was that broke off their friendship so suddenly.

II. There were people of that kind in the court of King Saul, who, instead of trying to mollify him and appease his anger when they saw that he was hostile to David, whom they knew to be innocent, enraged him still more by their calumnies, so that in his passion he tried to put an end to David altogether. Theodore Santabarenus was a tale-bearer, too. Wishing to put the newly-elected emperor Leo out of the way, he went to him and warned him, as a true friend, to be on his guard against his father, and therefore never to go hunting without having a dagger concealed on his person, so as to be able to defend himself in case of attack. The young emperor suspecting no

treachery, followed the advice. Santabarenus then went to the 4 old Emperor Basil, and advised him to be on his guard against

his son, who was plotting to take away his life, and as a proof of that he would find that Leo carried a dagger concealed about his person when out hunting. The treacherous plan succeeded; the dagger was found, and Basil became so enraged that he immediately commanded that his son’s eyes should be put out, and that he should be strangled, a sentence that would have been carried into effect had not Basil’s councilors by earnest representations induced him to mitigate the severity of it.

There are plenty of those evil-tongued people to be found everywhere nowadays, who by their tale-bearing cause disunion and enmity between the dearest friends, and the devil might well say to them what he once said to an old hag who created the bitterest hatred between a husband and wife that had formerly loved each other dearly: “You are far worse and more mischievous than I and all my associates in hell.”

What terrible curses are uttered in Holy Scripture against those wicked people! “The whisperer and the double-tongued is accursed; for he hath troubled many that were at peace.” Not without reason, then, may we count them amongst the children of Belial; for if it is true that, “blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God,” there is no doubt that they who disturb peace are children of the devil. “Six things there are which the Lord hateth, and the seventh his soul detesteth,” and utterly abhors. And what is that? “Him that soweth discord among brethren;” that is, a tale-bearer who creates enmity and strife among others. Would it not be better for one of that character to be dumb than to make such a wicked use of his tongue? Ah, let us carefully avoid all tale-bearing!

What a disgraceful thing that is! The ancient Romans, in making their libations to their idols, used a vessel so constructed that it could not stand upright, and whatever it contained had to be poured out at once. A talkative man is like that vessel; he opens his mouth so often and so wide to talk that whatever is poured in at his ears flows out at once; he cannot keep to himself a single thing he hears, but must tell it immediately. In the Book of Ecclesiasticus we read how the Holy Ghost speaks of such a man: “At the hearing of a word the fool is in travail, as a woman groaning in the bringing forth a child;” and again: “As an arrow that sticketh in a man’s thigh, so is a word in the heart of a fool.” He who has an arrow sticking in his body has no rest until it is pulled out. Tie anything to the tail of a cat or a dog, and the animal will run about until it gets rid of it. So the loquacious man, when he has heard a secret, is on thorns until he has told it to some one who will be glad to hear it. In the same chapter we read: “Hast thou heard a word against thy neighbor, let it die within thee.”

This advice is followed in too literal a sense sometimes by talkative people; that is, they deal with secrets as they would under certain circumstances with one who has just died. Sometimes it happens that when a person is dying his father, or mother, or the priest alone is present; hardly has the breath left him when word is sent to his friends and relatives, the church bell is tolled, and the body is laid out for all the neighbors to see. In the same way a secret dies with those loquacious people; that is, they tell all they know about it at once. What a disgrace it is, I repeat, for a man especially, to have so little control over his tongue! No one will trust him in any important business, nor will people dare to speak of any weighty matter in presence of one who has the reputation of not knowing how to hold his tongue, and of being a betrayer of secrets. What a disgrace that is for a man!

People generally say that it is not safe to trust a secret to a woman, for she will not be able to keep it. I know not whether there are any grounds for that saying, but I must say, in defence of women, that there is, at all events, one fact to prove that they are not all untrustworthy. Laertius tells us of a brave woman at Athens, whose fame has descended to posterity. She knew an important secret that Hippias, the tyrant, was very anxious to hear, and that he tried to worm out of her by every possible means, both personally and by his most skilful councilors; he had recourse to flatteries, caresses, promises, and bribes, but all to no purpose; the brave woman kept her secret with the utmost determination. At last the tyrant lost patience and said to her: I will make you confess all you know; he then ordered the fire and the rack to be prepared in order to extract the secret from her by torture; but the heroic woman said to him: “Do what you will, you will never compel me to say a word of what I cannot disclose without breaking my faith to one who trusted in me;” and thereupon she bit a large piece off her tongue, and spat it into his face; “she spat out her tongue in the tyrant’s face that she might not be forced to let out the secret.” The Athenians erected a pillar in her honor, with the inscription: “By her virtue she rose superior to her sex.” And nowadays we might well add that the heroic silence of this woman puts many a man to shame, and that, too, in a matter in which every one is bound to act a manly part, and not allow himself to be compelled by fear of torments, or through a spirit of adulation, or through mere talkativeness, to disclose secrets that he is bound as a matter of duty, and often under oath, to keep to himself.

But, I might well say to such people, if you are so fond of hearing your own voices, and find it so hard to hold your tongues, then why do you not speak when duty requires you?

Why do you not give your opinion honestly according to conscience and justice? But we might cry out to them as Christ did to the dumb man, at the top of our voices: “Ephpheta: be thou opened,” without getting them to say a word! They are like those dogs that bark at and bite their master’s friends, but keep quite still when thieves break into the house. As the prophet Isaias says: “they are dumb dogs, not able to bark;” nor do they dare to do so, although their duty requires it. Therefore, I say again, if you must speak, speak when your duty requires, and hold your tongues when you cannot speak without doing mischief. If public vices and abuses are to be corrected and abolished; if your servants, or children, or wives require chastisement or admonition, in order to urge them to do good, or to abstain from evil, that is the time for you to speak; then you may open your mouths to some purpose. But when you have pledged your word, or your duty and obligation, or the law of God and justice require you to keep a secret, then is the time for you to be silent; then you must say: “my secret for myself, my secret for myself.”

In conclusion, I wish you and myself the same benefit that Christ conferred on the dumb man: “And the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spoke right.” Oh, what a beautiful but rare art it is to know how to speak properly at all times! Let us try with all possible diligence to learn it, to keep a guard over the tongue, that dangerous member, from which so much evil and sin proceeds daily, and never to say anything against the honor of God or the charity we owe our neighbor. If we are entrusted with a secret; if we see or hear anything privately of our neighbor, which we ourselves would not wish to be made known if we were the persons concerned, or which might be the cause of mischief; oh, then let us rather, like that heroic woman, bite off our tongues than let the least word fall that might betray the secret! Let us daily beg of God, who alone can govern our tongue: “Set a watch, oh, Lord, before my mouth; and a door round about my lips,” that not a word may proceed from us without being first examined to see if it is such as we ought to speak; so that, for the rest of our lives, it may be said of us with truth: “They spoke right.” Amen.

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