

8th Sunday in Ordinary Time (C)

Today, we hear Jesus speaking in Galilee; we also hear a Jewish sage named Sirach writing in Jerusalem more than a century earlier. The two of them touch upon a single truth: the words that come out of us make known the hidden thoughts within us. Speech reveals the contents of the heart.

Sirach teaches that speaking is the test of character (Sir 27:7). One who is upright will utter words that are truthful and encouraging to others. But one whose heart is cluttered with “refuse” will be exposed, since the “fruit” of his mouth speaks volumes about the tree that produces it (Sir 27:6). In a similar way, Jesus insists that a person speaks “out of the abundance of the heart” (Luke 6:45). He too compares our speech, whether good or bad, to what grows on a tree: “For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit” (Luke 6:43). Both readings urge us to make wholesome speech a habit. After all, much about who we are is brought to light through what we say. But there’s an additional step: the Lord is asking us to look inward, to examine our hearts and fill them with the “good treasure” that God desires.

Purity of heart and speech matter because Jesus declares elsewhere: “by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matt 12:37). They matter because they help to decide our final judgement, and this is where the second reading today comes in. Paul reminds us that God will destroy death forever, and if we are to share in this victory and live forever with the Lord, then we must take all steps necessary to give our hearts and lips to only what is good.

Lent is about to begin. Lent is not merely about giving things up; it is also about fighting and removing the worldly behaviors that we have let take root in us and rot our souls. I would challenge you, take time today to examine your daily behavior in regard to the theme of today’s readings: our speech.

Do you slander others when they commit a wrong against you?

Are you inclined to gossip?

Do you fill your day with conversation and noise but don’t consistently talk to God for a dedicated amount each day in prayer?

Do you boast about yourself? This allows pride to move in and begin to destroy the soul.

Nothing is more harmful and ruinous in our spiritual progress and relationship with others than an uncontrolled tongue. As you consider what you will take on and give up for Lent, perhaps consider the following; one is outward restraint and quiet, the other is inward restraint and quiet:

1. Resist the urge to talkativeness, to the prideful need to be heard, to the prideful need to be right and win every conversation.
2. Pick a time each day to pray in silence for at least 15 minutes, if you don't already. This is allowing the voice of the heart to speak and allow God to move it to bear good fruit.

Cultivating quiet and restraining our tongue is not easy, especially in the world we live in, but growing outward silence and restraint in our words helps lead to interior quiet, and it is in this quiet that God waits for us and speaks to our heart, filling it with Truth and Goodness.