

THE TONGUE

by Deacon Rafael de los Reyes

It is about something we all know, since we all have it and use it. Some of us use it properly and some use it incorrectly. With it we can either build or destroy. We can make our fellow man/woman feel good, or inflict much harm. We are talking about the tongue; that organ in our body, so necessary to taste and eat, but above all, to speak.

Meditating the Word of God, we find, in the Letter of James, that the Apostle uses several verses to speak to us precisely about the tongue. We read: ***“Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness. For we all make many mistakes, and if any one makes no mistakes in what he says he is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body also. If we put bits into the mouths of horses that they may obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Look at the ships also; though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So the tongue is a little member and boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is an unrighteous world among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the cycle of nature, and set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by humankind, but no human being can tame the tongue -- a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brethren, this ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening fresh water and brackish? Can a fig tree, my brethren, yield olives, or grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh”*** (James 3:1-12)

We can do a lot of good with the proper use of our tongue, but we can also cause much harm if we were to misuse it. With the tongue, we can honor a brother, but we can also insult him. Let us view some advise as to how we are to behave when we speak; all of us can find this through the Sacred Scriptures.

The Apostle James tells us: ***“Know this, my beloved brethren. Let every man be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger”*** (James 1:19) How many times have we regretted having said many things that truly we did not mean, as a result of our impatience and anger? How many families have been destroyed from not knowing how to listen be it husband to wife, parents to children and vice-versa? The struggle to contain our tongue, and use it with prudence and to edify is very ancient.

All we have to do is remember the Eighth Commandment of Gods' Law, that tell us: ***“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor”*** (Ex 20:16) Sin is an obstacle to man's good relations with neighbors, so God gave us the Commandment so that when we keep it, we are able to get along with our neighbor. The improper use of the tongue can cause great harm to our neighbor. Depending on the seriousness of this harm, we can

either commit a venial or a mortal sin. Mortal sin leads us to a spiritual death. And if physical death surprises us while in mortal sin, our spiritual death becomes eternal death.

That is why we read in the book of Proverbs: **“Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits”** (Pr 18:16) Sometimes for speaking too much, we get into problems.

We read in Ecclesiastes: **“A fool multiplies words”** (Ec 10:14) and in the book of Proverbs:

“Listen to advice and accept instruction, that you may gain wisdom for the future” (Pr 19:20) In other words: human wisdom is not achieved for speaking a lot, rather for knowing how to listen. When we are asked and we do not know the answer, we must respond that we do not know, and if allowed, search for the answer and when we have it, respond.

The humility in recognizing that we don't know everything will help us to control our tongue. Just as the book of Sirach says: **“The mind of fools is in their mouth, but the mouth of wise men is in their mind”** (Si 21:26) In other words: The fool says everything he thinks; but the wise thinks everything he says. The tongue also reflects our education and manners. ¿Have you ever experienced dealing with foul mouthed persons?

Today, more than ever, bad words are in fashion, in Spanish and in English. In English they are called “four letter words”. Nowadays, it is extremely rare to find a movie without foul language and dirty or offensive expressions. It is unpleasant to hear such a crass and dirty vocabulary in a man, and much worse listening to women using these foul expressions. We have always admired femininity in a woman that respects herself, and wears an elegant and decent wardrobe; possibly her vocabulary is clean and educated. But when the tongue is dirty, the rest of the behavior leaves much to be desired.

St. Paul, when telling us what we must do to attain a new life in Christ, tells us in his letter to the Ephesians: **“Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for edifying, as fits the occasion, that it may impart grace to those who hear”** (Eph 4:29). It is impossible to live in a state of Grace, and at the same time express ourselves in a vulgar manner. When we wish to grow in Christ, we must be willing to behave properly, as members of His Mystical Body, where He is the Head and we are the limbs. And we as limbs, we must grow and develop in love. We could never achieve this, if we mutually offend each other by using foul language.

Even in our relation with non-believers, that is, those who do not belong to the Mystical Body of Christ, St. Paul speaking to us about the social duties of the Christian, teaches us to be wise and to use time well.

In his letter to the Colossians, He tell us: **“Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer every one”** (Col 4:6) Saint Paul is telling us that we must have prudence when dealing with the world; and not to let us be influenced by its values and criteria. We live in the world, but we are not of

the world. That is why we must take advantage of our time and not waste it in worthless arguments. Instead, let us try to always be ready so as to have a pleasant conversation and in good taste, that will assist us in building the Kingdom of God.

God, please, ¡Keep us from being envious! Those with envy are not capable of holding their tongue, and very capable of raising false testimonies. Let us remember Jesus' words in the Gospel of Mark: **"There is nothing outside a man which by going into him can defile him; but the things which come out of a man are what defile"** (Mk 7:15). May God keep us from being proud! Pride is the root of all sin. To be proud is to be foolish. The fool talks too much. God, please, ¡Keep us from gossip! Gossip is like a cancer in the Mystical Body of Christ.

In his letter to the Galatians, St. Paul writes: **"Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Look to yourself, lest you too be tempted"** (Gal 6:1) Here, St. Paul invites us to be always willing to help the fallen brother get up. But, he very well tells us that we are to do this with much charity. First of all, we must discern if we are capable to do this objectively and willingly accept to be rejected by the one whom we want to help. If we are not capable, let us not do it, since, as the Apostle says, we could too be put to a test.

The tongue my dear brothers and sisters, is used many a times to criticize our brothers. Don't you think is now time to use the tongue to honor him or her? Have you ever been praised by another person? What does it mean to be honored? Well, it is listening about your good qualities, virtues, achievements etc.

For example a husband would honor his wife in their wedding anniversary and in front of all the guests by telling her what she has been to him through life; that she has always been his wings and not an anchor to his profession, apostolate or ministry; that she has always been a good and loving partner, and exceptional mother, a woman of prayer, etc.

A son would honor his father by telling him how much he loves him, how proud of him he is, how grateful he is for the support he always had from his father through life, for always having been a friend at his side, for talking and listening to him, etc.

A friend could honor another friend by telling him how grateful he is for being there when needed; honoring him with his unselfish friendship, for always sharing with his friends, and above all, for his love to Jesus Christ Our Lord and Savior.

Don't you think that this is making good use of the tongue? How good would we feel if we were to listen to these things coming from our loved ones and friends?

The tongue must be used to evangelize, let us recall St. Paul's words in his letter to the Romans: **"For, everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved." But how are men to call upon him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without a**

preacher? And how can men preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach good news!" (Rom 10:13-15)

The tongue above all must be used to praise, pray, sing and give thanks to God, as Saint Paul tells us in his letter to the Colossians: ***"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him"*** (Col 3:16-17)

Lastly, we must be open to the inspirations and exhortations of the Holy Spirit that move us to praise and glorify God without fear, without shame, using our tongue to express ourselves not only on our own languages or idioms, but in the tongues of the Spirit – the tongue of God. In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul writes: ***"For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship, when we cry, "Abba Father!" (Rom 8:15); and "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words" (Rom 8:26)***