

Scripture Reading

A Reading of the Letter of James (*James 3:5-10*)

Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. The Word of the Lord. R. Thanks be to God.

Reflection – Tame that Spark of Fire

The tongue, a small but mighty organ. The tongue, a gift of God can be used to praise God and uplift others but if we are not careful, it can be used at their disservice also. Significantly, it is an organ singled out for punishment in hell: "itself set on fire by hell." (cf. James 3:6). The Lord wants to give us grave warning on the careless and sinful use of the tongue. Tiny though it is, it has the potential to bring condemnation to the soul especially through the grievous sins of slander and calumny.

The tongue can be used to destroy the honour and reputations of individuals, communities and even whole nations. The tongue is likened to a spark of fire. The effects of the tongue are like that of fire. How does one retract words spoken against another person whether it is true or untrue? Even if it were true, the casual telling of the evil deeds of another person results in everyone being worse off: the person spreading the story is guilty of speaking ill against his neighbour, his listeners were opened to the temptation of spreading the story and adding on to it, and the reputation of the person involved ended up worse than before. Herein lies the gravity of this sin: that it is extremely difficult to make reparation as it is virtually impossible to retrace the path of the gossip or slander, reinstating reputation and honour where it was unjustly taken away from that person known or unknown. When it happens in church to a church leader, he may find his moral authority unjustly undermined and the faithful disappointed and discouraged. A deep wound is inflicted on that community which may take a long time to heal. Is it a wonder that few qualified people of good calibre are willing to take up positions of public office?

Through indiscretion, it is easy to spread evil through the tongue. A person's reputation can be destroyed through a careless confiding of one's dark secrets to a friend who though sworn to secrecy could not resist telling some of it to her closest friends. As the tongue is most difficult to control, the process continued with closest friends of that friend being told of the secret with some added misinformation in the process of transmission from mouth to ear. Very soon, the dark secret becomes even darker and becomes public knowledge in the community. As a result, the reputation of that person is destroyed and everyone involved has used the tongue for evil purposes.

It is so easy to pass judgement without even realising it. *For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.'* *The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.'* (Matthew 11:18-19). It is difficult to tame the tongue. The mind is prone to judging others and the tongue faithfully conveys what the mind thinks. With no conscious check on the mind and tongue, judgemental remarks can become the stuff of our conversation with friends. **Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8).** When we love others we do not casually pass negative information about them. When someone sins against us we are to talk to that person privately first before taking further action if necessary (cf. Matthew 18:15). St. Peter further warns us to grow in maturity as Christians by getting rid of old unchristian behaviours especially sins of the tongue: *rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation* (1 Peter 2:1-2). By curbing our tongue so that it is used more to render praise to God and to uplift others, we take a giant step in growing in spiritual maturity.

Conversation with Jesus

Precious Lord, thank You for the gift of the tongue. May I use it all the days of my life to thank and praise You and speak only good of others. Fill my heart with holy love, for You said the mouth speaks what the heart is full of (cf. Luke 6:45). Rid my heart of all the roots of envy, jealousy and pettiness which give rise to unkind remarks. Shine Your light into my mind that it may never be judgemental but be filled with Your wisdom and truth. Help me guard my tongue with love, prudence and wisdom so that I may not confide unnecessarily or unwisely or spread negative information about others or raise careless judgemental remarks. Let it be given free rein only when I am praising and exalting the Lord. Mary, Protectress of the Faith, pray for me. Thank You Jesus. Praise You Jesus.