

## *In Nomine Jesu*

**Prayer Upon Entering Church:** Grant, merciful Lord, to Your faithful People pardon and peace that they may be cleansed from all their sins and serve You with a quiet mind; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

### **The Text**

*“A good name is more desirable than great wealth. Respect is better than silver or gold. The rich and the poor have this in common: The Lord is Maker of them all.”* Proverbs 22:1-2

### **The Sermon**

#### **Words**

Words are wonderful things. They are the symbols by which we convey to each other the product and richness of our experience on this planet. Words are the materials out of which – great poetry – great drama – and great preaching – is built. Words are the medium of conversation and social intercourse in this world. Words are – therefore – among the most priceless assets of humankind.

Words may be beautiful in expressing sublime thoughts and lofty inspirations. By them – soul catches fire from soul – and mind from mind. But as are all precious assets – words are dangerous. The very thing that makes for their beauty and usefulness can become ugly and harmful. Words can curse as well as bless – destroy as well as build.

That’s why I never climb into the pulpit in any church without first getting down on my knees and breathing the old psalmist’s prayer: *“May the words from my mouth and the thoughts from my heart be acceptable to **You**, O Lord, my Rock and my Defender.”* (Ps 19:14)

Any man who will dare to assay to preach learns the value and importance of words very quickly. They are the swift arrows which wing their way to

the minds and hearts of his hearers. Sometimes those arrows must wound – more often bless – but the preacher dare not forget the power of words.

This prayer of the psalmist is one we might all well pray, therefore, at the beginning of each day, before we begin life with our fellows. Unfortunately, most of us are not aware of the divine love which broods over our every thought and word. But that awareness – that sense of God in our lives – gives us the essence of real religion.

Words are expressions of thought. If our thoughts are wrong, they are bound to find expression in wrong words. Worse yet is the absence of thought which produces the nonsense of so much of our conversation.

Someone has said that the fine art of conversation has fallen in our day before the babble of intelligent morons who know all the right words but lack any capacity for thought behind the words. They can tell you how they *feel*, but they cannot tell you what they think or why. Whether that is true or not is not for me to say. But this much is true: We are living in an age when the precious gift of language is wasted on the expression of many things *not worth* expressing.

Our emails – our printing presses – the TV and talk radio – the campaign ads so prolific in this election season – and the hard, cynical *repartee* of the “sophisticated” of this world – spew forth *words* in a steady torrent – much of which is sheer waste. We are a wordy generation – and yet so much of what we have to say – is not worth saying – and merely destroys the good name and reputation of some innocent.

No one realized the need for economy in speech more than Jesus. The Master used words as no other religious genius has ever done. He appreciated their value. For Him – words were *too precious* to waste. Simple – direct – forceful – He has left us sentences that are as sparkling and clear cut as diamonds in any language. He tells us: “*This is My Body – given for you. This is My Blood of the New Testament, shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.*” (Mt 26)

Or think of the great I AM’s of Jesus in St. John’s Gospel: *I am the Messiah.* (Jn 4:25-26). *I am the Bread of Life.* (Jn 6:35) *I am from above.* (Jn 8:25) *Before Abraham was born, I am.* (8:58) *I am the Light of the world.* (9:5) *I am the Door of the sheep.* (10:7) *I am the Good Shepherd.*

(10:14) *I am the Son of God.* (10:36) *I am the Resurrection and the Life.* (11:25) *I am Teacher and Lord.* (13:13) *I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life.* (14:6) *I am the true Vine.* (15:6) And in the Revelation to St. John, the Master says: *I am the Alpha and the Omega.* (Rev 1:8) *I am the First and the Last.* (Rev. 1:17)

And that Master says: “*Simply say yes or no. Anything more than that comes from the evil one.*” (Mt 5:37)

St. Paul begins his matchless chapter on love with these words: “*I may speak in the languages of humans and of angels. But if I don’t have love – I am a loud gong or a clashing cymbal.*” (I Cor 13:1) **Would to God that those words could be emblazoned in every home of this city – in all the aisles and parking lots at Econofoods – on the streets of Clintonville – in our places of business and recreation!**

Because nowhere is the uncharitableness of Christians more subtly apparent than in their speech. How often an otherwise stimulating conversation will descend to the depths of vulgar gossip. **There is no place for gossip in a Christian Church – or in any Christian society. A gossiping Christian is a contradiction in terms.**

Of course, we share our mutual woes and our mutual burdens bear as the hymn puts it. But that is quite a different matter from the careless way in which we feel free to criticize each other. We do it in our homes where a child’s innocence is poisoned by our judgments. We do it in our social life where eager itching ears are quick to catch some juicy little tidbit which then blights a reputation and mars a character of an innocent person.

And even worse is what we used to call innuendo. More harm is done by the merest suggestion of wrongdoing on the part of another than by positive open accusation. The trouble with this sort of unguarded word is that it plants the seed of distrust in the mind of the hearer.

By the slightest suggestion of dishonesty or wrong conduct, we can blight the friendships of a lifetime and destroy the confidence which is the basis of all human relationships on this planet. And the tragedy of thoughtless or harmful words is our inability to take them back. Once said, they go on their wounding way – and no amount of correction on our part can affect the evil

we have unleashed. As soon as the words fall from the lips and enter the receiver of the telephone, it is impossible to bring them back.

One of the most distressing aspects of our time is the ease with which we can sin in this regard. It is *so easy* to click on that mouse and send an email. It is *so easy* to speak a word in heat which can never be retracted. When people live in an atmosphere of tension and anxiety, it is *so easy* to become suspicious of others and to express that suspicion in the casual word which questions someone's loyalty – or integrity – or motivation – and then blights a reputation of an innocent person.

Perhaps most tragic of all in its long range effect is the universal use of words in times like these as weapons – weapons of hatred – weapons of ill will – between nations – between races – between creeds. And I wonder sometimes if some of the words spoken by our leaders may not someday come back like boomerangs.

The word of our mouths *must be acceptable* in God's sight – or they will be used by the devil. And unless we – like the psalmist in his prayer or the author of this inspired text – can somehow set a guard before our lips – through prayer and thought – we are in the greatest danger indeed of harming – both God – our fellows – and ourselves. Listen again the inspired words of God in this text: *“A good name is more desirable than great wealth. Respect is better than silver or gold. The rich and the poor have this in common: The Lord is Maker of them all.”* (Prov 22:1-2) Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds + in Christ Jesus. Amen.

***SOLI DEO GLORIA!***