

Homily for the 8th Sunday in Ordinary Time 2022 Year C

A man's words flow from out of that which fills his heart.

One of the greatest gifts that God gave to man was not just the power to think and to feel, but the power to communicate those thoughts and feelings in the spoken and written word.

In the natural order of things the purpose of speech is to transmit and communicate directly and accurately what is in our mind and in our heart.

If we are bursting with joy then it is unnatural for us to say that we are heartbroken; If sadness and grief weigh heavily upon us, it is unnatural for us to laugh and say that we haven't a care in the world.

There is a contradiction between the thought or the feeling and the words that come out to express it.

This is the essence of what a lie is and why a lie is so wrong. It is the deliberate abuse of the power of speech. Our words do not tell you what is in our minds or our hearts.

The power of speech is a potent thing, and because we are so used to exercising it from our earliest years, we lose a sense of what a very special thing it is. Too often we speak hastily or carelessly. Our mouths are not connected to our brains.

Words have consequences. Words can be kind or they can be cruel. Words can create or ruin. They can build up or they can destroy. They can be used to heal or they can cause irreparable harm. They can inspire someone or take all hope away. They can cause great joy or terrible pain. Simple things like words make all the difference between war or peace, between life or death for millions.

The Old Hebrew mentality had a tremendous respect for the spoken word. It was like a living thing, once uttered it took on an existence of its own, and it could not easily be silenced. They believed that if you cursed someone, it was a solemn and terrible thing to do. Your curse sped to that person like an arrow to the heart. It could not be called back. If you regretted your curse, all you could do was to send a powerful blessing after it, hoping it would reach the person and undo the curse.

Now we laugh at such notions today, but they are not so very far from the truth. Words are not living things, but once spoken, their power is enormous.

You can destroy a person's character with a few well-placed words.

You can heal and give new life to someone in despair with a few well-chosen words.

How many times in our lives have we deeply regretted our harsh or unkind words, or our lies, when we see the terrible harm that they have done?

How many times have we regretted failing to speak words of love and kindness, when they could have made such a difference. Part of the terrible pain of the death of a loved one is the things left unsaid to that person.

Words properly used are meant to reveal, expose, and communicate what is in our mind and heart. Like it or not, our spoken words reveal a lot about what kind of person we are.

Our character and dispositions come out in our words. Pay closer attention the next time someone is speaking to you, don't just listen to what they are saying, but also how they say it.

If a person has experienced a lot of hurt and disappointment in their life, it shows in the way that they speak to you. All those unhealed wounds show themselves in the general and habitual tone of that person's conversation. Moaning, whining, cynical or cheap snide remarks; negative views on life and other people; harsh and critical judgments; never a good word to say about anybody or anything; just slander and lies. We all know somebody like that and maybe we are even guilty of it ourselves.

Suffice to say that anyone who allows their lives to become so discoloured by regular, habitual and negative conversational gloom had better snap out of such a habit pretty quickly, because enormous harm is being done to themselves. There is a lot of hurt deep inside that person that they need to address and heal. Like the Gospel says, "First remove the plank from your own eye before you try and remove the splinter from your brother's eye".

And how refreshing it is to meet a person whose conversation is not discoloured. That person who always has a smile on their lips, whose words are gentle and optimistic. They are not fools because they do know the negative and painful side of life. But they always try to accentuate the positive and the good that is there in people and in situations. They do not use words as a

weapon, to tear apart and destroy. Rather, it is a habit of life with them to affirm, encourage and to inspire. Conversation with such a person is always a delight and you come away feeling refreshed and renewed. With the other sort of person you feel soiled and are left with a need to wash off the gloom that rubbed off onto you.

A man's word certainly flows from what fills his heart, so perhaps we need to be a little bit more careful of what we allow to fill our hearts.

It is a very ancient religious discipline, taught in many faiths, that we should watch over very carefully the door to our hearts. To have control over what we allow in.

For the most part, we have lost sight of that self-control. We choose to exercise very little control, under the excuse of freedom. We allow our hearts to be coarsened and polluted, invaded by constant harmful rubbish 24 hours a day. In doing so we pay a price.

Pay closer attention to other people's conversations, but more important still, pay closer attention to your own. If, as a general habit of life, your conversations do not reflect a fair degree of joy, peace, charity, optimism and hope, the gifts of the Holy Spirit, then the problem may not be so much the tongue, but the wounded or sullied heart from which those thoughts and feelings spring.

Watch over the doors to your heart, for your words will flow from what fills it.