

From the Pastor

August 27, 2023

Twenty-First Sunday in Ordinary Time

Pope Francis on Gossip

As many of you know I have tried to use these weekly articles to teach different aspects of our Catholic Faith and Life so we may grow in our knowledge of the faith. The primary purpose of my articles has been to help us to become the saints that God wants us all to be. Surely, you have heard me speak of this most uplifting truth, and you have read about it in the Bulletin. Yes, as our patron St. Paul reminds us, *This is God's will for you, that you become saints.*

Perhaps it is an idea that never has entered your mind. But God Our Lord sent His Only Begotten Son to die on the Cross for our sins and to open to us the gates of heaven. God wants us to be saints. So beginning this week, I will be writing about different obstacles to our growth in holiness: greed, lust, envy, pride, gluttony, sloth, and anger. These are called the capital sins because all sins are simply variations of them. Today I would like to write on gossip, a grave sin that many dismiss as something light or of no consequence, but, which in reality, is most displeasing to God and harmful to ourselves both in the natural order and supernatural order.

No one likes a gossip even though their words may at first be appealing. Because of our fallen nature, we all like to hear gossip. As probably all of our mothers taught us as children, we should never listen to a gossip, because in all likelihood, the person who gossips about another, will also be gossiping about us behind our back. The great political philosopher Machiavelli alluded to this behavior in his classical Renaissance work, *The Prince*. There Machiavelli gave the advice to a ruling prince that when traitors betray someone, even if it is to the Prince's immediate advantage, the Prince can be certain that they will also betray him. It is the same with gossip, which permeates our society. Gossip sells books and magazines, drives the ratings of talk shows, and, sadly, has even lead to young and impressionable individuals taking their own lives, because of things spread about them on the Internet. And sadly, parishes are not exempt from this grave moral condition.

Gossip is a form of calumny, because it usually exaggerates a person's faults or sins with malice. It is a cowardly and despicable act of discussing the faults of another without necessity, and behind his back. *Tale-bearing* is a most despicable form of gossip. It consists of repeating to a person unfavorable remarks made about him. The priests are through God's mercy shielded from this sin, because, as you know, they may **never** reveal anything confided to them in confession, even if keeping it secret will result in death for the priest. The great Alfred Hitchcock film (and Hitchcock's own personal favorite) *I Confess* is a gripping suspense drama (in the typical Hitchcock style) of how a priest keeps secret what was revealed to him in confession. I recommend the film to all our parishioners.

Although Pope Francis is the Pope of Rome he nonetheless teaches in the style of a country pastor. He has particularly spoken and taught about the sin of gossip. Rather than my continuing I'd like to print some teachings of the pope in this matter.

Pope Francis has warned us all to avoid the terrorism of gossip which poisons the soul. At the Sunday Angelus address of last week the Pope said: *Gossip is so rotten. At the beginning, it seems to be something enjoyable and fun, like a piece of candy. But at the end it fills the heart with bitterness and also poisons us. I tell you the truth, I am firmly convinced that if each one of us would purposely avoid gossip, in the end, we would become saints, It is a beautiful path. Jesus offers the example of the Fifth Commandment, "Do not kill," and goes on to add, "but I say to you: Whoever is angry with his brother will be guilty before the court." With this Jesus reminds us that even words can kill. When it is said that someone has the tongue of a serpent what does it mean? That his words kill. Therefore, not only must one not make an attempt on the life of others, but one must not even pour on him the poison of anger and hit him with slander, nor speak ill of him. And here we arrive at gossip. Gossip can also kill, because it kills the reputation of the other person.* Thus speaks our Holy Father.

If somehow we imagine we have been hurt by another person, we should immediately believe that it was a misunderstanding and not deliberate. Very rarely do people wake up with the intention to do us harm that day. But our imagination takes over and we believe that we are the object of others' deliberate hatred for us. And once the imagination takes control of us it leads us in the direction of the devil.

Going around gossiping is always inhuman; it reveals a person of mediocre quality. It is a sign of being uneducated; it shows a lack of refinement of feeling; it is unworthy of a Christian.

Yes, sadly I have seen the poisonous nature of gossip too frequently which can destroy so much good. We may find it hard to believe, but even the priests are the object of gossip. That is totally understandable in the natural order, because while there may be over a thousand parishioners, there is only one priest and therefore he makes a very attractive and easy target. As our dear friend Monsignor McDonald always said, "The easiest thing to do is to criticize." May I share an amusing observation that was once printed in a magazine for priests and has brought me many a chuckle. See if it sounds familiar.

WHAT THE CRITICS SAY

Here is a summary of remarks made about pastors of a typical Catholic parish:

If his homily is long: "He puts us to sleep."

If it is short: "He's unprepared."

If he raises his voice: "He's shouting."

If he speaks normally: "We can't hear him."

If he's away: "He's always on vacation."

If he stays home: “He doesn’t have a life.”

If he’s out visiting: “He’s never home.”

If he’s in the rectory: “He never visits his parish.”

If he mentions finances: “He’s always talking about money.”

If he doesn’t: “Our parish never does anything.”

If he’s young: “He has no experience.”

If he’s older: “When will he retire?”

And, of course, if he dies: “No one can ever replace him!”

-The Priest.

SAVE THE DATES: Our Parish Picnic will be on Sunday September 24th at 12 noon. Please pray for fair weather that day,

LITTLE SISTERS OF THE POOR: On **Saturday/Sunday September 2/3**, we will once again welcome the Little Sisters of the Poor. The Little Sisters are very close to St. Paul’s and were much loved by my two immediate predecessors Monsignor Costa and Monsignor Clerkin. Due to the pandemic, the Little Sisters have not been to visit St. Paul’s since 2018. Sister Mary Alexandra, LSP, will make the appeal for the Little Sisters who care for the elderly poor. The Little Sisters life is itself an inspiration and teaching. They teach by the example of their lives and not by their words.

We close with a very uplifting quote from one of the homilies of the great Doctors of the Church, St. Bernard. He is considered the last of the Fathers of the Church.

LOOK TO MARY: *Look to the star of the sea, call upon Mary...in danger, in distress, in doubt, think of Mary, call upon Mary. May her name never be far from your lips, or far from your heart...If you follow her, you will not stray; if you pray to her, you will not despair; if you turn your thoughts to her, you will not err. If she holds you, you will not fall; if she protects you, you need not fear; if she is your guide, you will not tire; if she is gracious to you, you will surely reach your destination.* – St. Bernard of Clairvaux

In Jesus and Mary,

Monsignor James F. Pereda