

We are Not Dumb

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By:

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I.

THE WORLD is full of beautiful things. Some time you have stood at night under a starlit sky and gazed in wonderment at the jewels and gems scattered in such lavish profusion across that blue canopy. Or you have climbed up a mountain-side, and from the summit have feasted your eyes on the scene of loveliness that stretched itself out below you—a veritable corner of paradise you called it—and you strained to catch the gladsome melody of the lark coming down to your earth “from heaven or near it.” With a sense of sheer delight rushing into your heart, you listened that day to the shrill notes of the thrush and you heard the cuckoo or robin proclaim again and again to the world the joyous tidings that summer is here. Have you sometimes risen early and watched for the first streaks of the morning sun? That lamp which at dawn seemed little more than a flicker you have seen gradually swell out into the glory of the noonday splendor, and then you have followed its course across its path until it sank down in the west at evening time, a blaze of golden loveliness.

I suppose you have sometimes settled yourself on a high cliff and, from your place there, you looked at that limitless expanse of ocean before you: you were thrilled at the sight of those huge breakers lumbering towards you. Another time, you watch from below as those breakers gather in force and gain in speed until they crashed recklessly into the rocks at your feet and sent their volleys of white foam up into the sunlight. You are a lover of flowers and you have walked with visitors through your garden—showing your rose-beds, or lilies, or violets, or chrysanthemums, according to the season. You and your visitors partook of that rich perfume and beheld that wealth of color. What a keen sense of pleasure it gave you!

Yes, the world is full of beautiful things. All this beauty—whence does it come? “Every best gift and every perfect gift is from above, descending from the Father of lights.” In God’s original plan, everything without exception was beautiful God placed that all-beautiful creation at man’s disposal. However, by sin man marred its beauty. If sin and selfishness were eliminated from God’s work, there would be none of the ills that flesh is heir to—no sickness or poverty or death, no hunger or cold, no unkindness, no anger, no unjust inequality in the distribution of this world’s goods, and no war or rumors of war. All these evils are the result of sin, which means the thwarting and the setting at defiance of the laws formed by God for the governance of His universe.



However, in spite of the ravages of sin, much that is beautiful and much that is lovable remains in the world. In the midst of this beauty walks man. Of all the creatures that fill the earth, man alone has been endowed by the Creator with the gift of intelligent speech. All the loveliness he sees around him comes from God, but nobody in the entire world, except him, can raise up eyes to heaven and speak words of formal praise and thanksgiving to the great Benefactor. Man is the tongue of creation. The birds of the air do indeed sing God's praises, but this they do unknowingly. The heavens do indeed show forth His glory, but they are unconscious of their own splendor and they know not Him Who has clothed them with such beauty. To man, and to man alone, God has given a tongue capable of speaking acts of formal praise.

When Michelangelo had completed his statue of Moses and stood gazing in admiration at the work in his hands, he called out, "Speak!" For all the perfection of its sculpture, the block of marble remained silent in the praises of him who had chiseled it and smoothed it to such a wondrous degree of beauty. When God had finished His work, He, too, would have it proclaim His praises. His creation must not be a dumb creation, so, when all was in readiness, on the sixth day He placed man in paradise and gave him a gift He had bestowed on none other. To man alone He said, "Speak!" To man He gave a tongue, with the gift of intelligent speech, so that he might kneel and thank God and praise Him for all the beautiful things with which He had enriched His world. For the seas, and the stars, and the sunsets, and the landscapes—for all these that are mute—man must praise the Giver. For the birds of the air, the fishes of the sea, and the beasts of the earth that know not their Maker—on behalf of these, and instead of these, must man speak words of praise. The only instrument by means of which God receives acts of formal praise in this entire world is the tongue of man. Inanimate creatures and irrational creatures are dumb in this praise. We are not dumb. We, and only we, can lift up grateful hearts and eyes to God and exclaim, "Deo gratias!" "Thanks be to God that what is, is so!"

What a mighty chorus of praise men have sung throughout the centuries! Go back to the Book of Psalms, those inspired hymns of the prophet, and see the wealth of imagery he employs and the heights of eloquence he reaches, as he extols one after another the wonderful attributes of God.

Here is an example, taken at random from the One Hundredth and Second Psalm, in which he sings of God's mercy. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and let all that is within me bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and never forget all that He hath done for thee, Who forgiveth all thy iniquities, Who healeth all thy diseases. . . . The Lord is compassionate and merciful, long-suffering and plenteous in mercy. . . . As a father hath compassion on his children, so hath the Lord compassion on them that



fear Him, for He knoweth our frame, He remembereth that we are dust....” In the next Psalm, “Bless the Lord, O my soul: O Lord, my God, Thou art exceedingly great. . . . How great are Thy works, O Lord! Thou hast made all things in wisdom: the earth is filled with Thy riches. . . .”

In the whole visible creation, only the tongue of man can speak like this.

When Our Divine Lord came on earth, He took up the refrain of praise. It is abundantly clear from the Gospel that in the eyes of Our Lord this whole world was an open book, on every page of which He saw written proofs of the love and the greatness and the mercy of the heavenly Father.

The birds of the air, flitting across the sky at evening time, have no sense or forethought to gather into barns, but the heavenly Father feeds them. The lilies swaying in the summer breeze, though now they are clothed with a beauty more than Solomon’s, will still wither very soon and be good for nothing except to be cast into the fire. It is the heavenly Father Who has given them their beauty. If He does that much for the birds of the air and the flowers of the field, how much more may we argue is He ready to do for His own children!

A whole book might be written to illustrate this attitude of Our Lord towards the creation around Him. His mind was attuned in such a way that everything spoke to Him of the Father and of heaven, and He was forever trying to teach men to rise from the contemplation of the beauty they could see to the still greater beauty and love of Him Whom they could not see. The farmer separating the wheat from the chaff, the shepherd gathering his sheep, the fishermen mending their nets or hauling in a catch, the sun shining in the heavens, the sower sowing his seed, or the hen with her chicks—what is more commonplace than these? These are the very things that serve Our Lord as reminders of the praise due to the heavenly Father. “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof,” and nobody recognized that more clearly and taught it more insistently than Jesus Christ.

The Church, following with faithful footsteps after the example of her Spouse and filled with His spirit, has ever impressed upon her children the sacred duty they have to use their tongues in praise of the heavenly Father. Go into a monastery and listen to the sons or daughters of Benedict or Dominic or Francis or Teresa chanting the Divine Office. This is the Church’s official way of praising God, and what a glorious hymn has resounded in these stalls since first these religious families were gathered together! Benedicite! Laudate! Gloria Patri! The whole Church unites thus as every day she commissions her priests and her religious to recite the different Hours of the Office. Day and night, she prays and praises. Taught by Christ’s example, she continues to voice Christ’s petitions to the Father, Christ’s desire that



the Father be known and loved, Christ's exultation that the Father was so worthy of all praise, and Christ's invitation to the whole wide world to link itself together and thank the Father, from Whom descends every best and every perfect gift.

That is the sublime function of the tongue of man. He, and only he, can sing the hymn of praise that David sang, that Our Lord perfected, and that Holy Church continues with ever-swelling volume, as her sons and daughters increase and multiply and fill the earth. What a wonderful instrument is the tongue of man! To him, and only to him, has been entrusted this mission of praise.

However, the dignity and power of the tongue do not end with the praises of God. It is very easy to make the transition from the heavenly Father to His children. With the tongue, we praise the Father, and, with the tongue, we can pour comfort and happiness into the hearts of the Father's children.

Here, too, Our Divine Lord is our Model. Who can measure the depths of peace that filled the soul of Magdalene when Jesus said to her, "Thy sins are forgiven thee?" Who can measure the courage that arose in the heart of the poor cripple lying for thirty-eight years by the pool of Bethsaida, when he was told, "Take up thy bed and walk. Go now and sin no more?" Who can measure the hope that was born to him that lay sick of the palsy when Jesus, looking tenderly at him, spoke one short word, "Confide, fili! Be of good heart, son?" A word from Him restored security to the little crew of fishermen when He came to them, walking upon the waters, and they heard Him say, above the roar of the storm, "It is I. Fear not!"

"Come, follow Me," was all He said to those first disciples, but there was such a persuasiveness in that little command that they seemed powerless to withhold the gift of themselves, so, "leaving all things, they followed Him."

Such power in a single word to comfort, to restore peace of soul, or to drive forth sadness from hearts long a prey to its baneful influence!

Here, as in everything else, the true Christian models himself on Christ and uses his tongue to sustain and comfort the children of God. Have you seen the smile of gratitude light up the face of that broken-hearted woman because you spoke a word to her in which she detected the ring of sincere sympathy? Have you noticed the change for the better that appeared in that man's attitude towards the cross, consequent on your words of heartfelt prayer for him? You have known great sinners who were converted to God by the spoken word. Tactfully, and after much prayer for guidance, you have approached your sinner and you have marveled at the words that came to your lips, at the readiness with which you found yourself able to counter his objections, and a joy not of this earth flooded your soul when you saw



the effect of your words. It may even have been that your sinner wept tears of sweet repentance there before your eyes. You have used your tongue, that wonderful God-given instrument, to bring back a soul to God.

Perhaps you induced your sinner to listen to God's word spoken by a preacher at mission or retreat. After years hardened in sin, you have had the satisfaction of watching a new life of hope and love dawn in his soul as he sat there by your side and heard how all these long years God had been waiting for his return to his Father's House; how He had given him chance after chance; how the sinner would now at this moment be in hell, were it not that that loving Father had treated His rebellious son with mercy instead of justice; or how God's own divine Son had bled on Calvary and died in disgrace for the sake of souls.

What force there is in this wonderful gift of God—the gift of speech! With the tongue, you can soften the sinner's heart and make him realize his value in God's sight. With the tongue, you can console those who are lonely and friendless. With this God-given instrument, you can inspire new courage by making it clear to some poor sufferer that, in you, he has a true friend.

Man, and man only, in all visible creation is able to speak and console and lighten the burden that presses so sorely on another's shoulder. Why are we so sparing in the use of so effective a remedy? A little more patience, a little more thoughtfulness, a little more care to send sunshine into another's life—this is the function of the tongue. A little more, but how much it can mean! Lastly, there is the power of silence, which means control of the tongue. "Melt down thy gold and silver," the Holy Ghost counsels, "and make a balance for thy words." Saint James writes, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man." There is such strength of character shown in the self-control exercised by silence. There is such a comfort in having for your friend a man with whom you can be absolutely at ease in entrusting him with your secret. Here again we turn our eyes instinctively towards the great Model. Look at the terrific strength of Our Lord's silence in His Passion. When accused in half-truths, He answered nothing. When treated with galling injustice by His corrupt judges, we are told, "Jesus held His peace." When questioned about His disciples and His doctrine by the jeering old man Annas, He deliberately refrained from saying a word about His disciples. About His doctrine He will speak, but concerning His friends He is silent. They have all run away from Him at the very moment He wants them most, so He prefers to keep silence about them. In dealing with the unfortunate Judas, there is evidence of the same wonderful control exercised by Our Lord over His speech. "What thou dost do quickly," He told him at the Supper Table, but nobody knew why He said this. Our Lord's obvious anxiety to shield Judas! His care to preserve the horrible secret of the traitor!



After the Resurrection, He comes to them in the Upper Room to console them. They have all turned their backs on Him, in spite of their fine promises, and this is the first time they meet again. However, if you were looking on at that wonderful scene, you would never suspect that Our Lord even knew of their disloyalty. Not a word of reproach or blame, but so much eagerness to make them realize that the dreadful Passion is over and He is back with them again—“only Jesus.” In all this, there is Our Lord’s power over His speech. “There is a time to speak and a time to keep silence”—and with what forcefulness His divine example drives home that lesson!

You will find the same power of controlling the tongue in His saints and faithful friends. Saint John Nepomocene was martyred for the seal of Confession. An unholy curiosity seized on Wenceslaus, Emperor of Bohemia, to extract from the saint what passed in the sacred tribunal of Penance. He tried persuasion; he flung John into prison; he tortured him on the rack, and applied burning torches to his naked body. All was in vain: the saint preserved an inviolate silence. Finally, in a fit of insane rage, Wenceslaus loaded him with chains and flung him into the river Muldaw. Thence his body was rescued and accorded a decent burial. Three hundred years later his tomb was opened. The saint’s body was found to be corrupt, but his tongue was still in the very same state as it had been at his burial. That was how God glorified Saint John Nepomocene for his faithful control of the gift of speech.

We thus discover three great functions of the tongue taught us by Our Lord. With the tongue, we have the wonderful privilege of lifting up our voice and praising God. With the tongue, we can speak words of kindness that will prove balm to a heart that is torn with sorrow. By abstention in our use of the tongue, by keeping silence at the right time and concerning certain matters, we develop a mighty strength of character and win the confidence of others. Our Lord, Who came on earth to teach us by His example how to live, stands before us as an admirable Model in praising the Father, in comforting the Father’s children, and in preserving silence.

Now, if you are a Catholic, there is yet one thing more that increases the dignity of your tongue and hallows your gift to speech. That is, that when you receive Holy Communion, your tongue actually becomes God’s resting-place. Your tongue is consecrated by that sacred contact. Our Lord wishes to secure possession of it so He may speak through you, as He spoke in His lifetime.

“If any man speak,” writes Saint Peter, “let him speak as the words of God.” Christ Our Lord depends on the Catholic whose tongue has been thus honored, to speak His message to the world.

So do not be a dumb Catholic. You will hear attacks on the Church, on the clergy, even on the very fundamentals of your faith. Do not take that sort of thing lying



down. You have nothing to fear, but much to be proud of in the history, past and present, of the Church. You have no need to adopt a semi-apologetic attitude for the dogmas and practices of your religion. Know your faith. Understand the eminent sanity of Catholicism. Remember that every argument you hear against the Church has been brought forward an uncountable number of times, and times an uncountable number of times has been answered. Do not forget that keener intellects than yours in every age—Newman, Manning, Lunn, Chesterton, and Orchard, to name a few at random—have sifted and resifted the evidence for the Catholic Church from every angle. The result was that, with the simplicity of little children, these mighty intellects bowed down in obedience to the Church's teaching and unreservedly accepted her dogmas as being the teaching of the Church founded by Jesus Christ. It was not that these men did not have difficulties. It was not that they began with the desire to be converted to the Church. Arnold Lunn began on the road to conversion by writing a book against the Church. However, the further he proceeded the more clearly he saw his errors, until, finally, faith came and he wrote his immortal defense of the Church and called it, "Now I See!"

This may seem to be a digression. If it is, it has at least a very practical bearing on our subject. We are not dumb. God has given us the gift of speech, and our words should be "as the words of God."

Many Catholics seem to be like the deaf mute that was brought to Christ, being deaf and dumb where their religion is concerned. Of what are we shy? We have our feet planted firmly on the rock of truth. We have the clear and consistent teaching of the Church in easily accessible form at our hand. We have the deep conviction in our hearts, the solid assurance given us with our faith that we are right. We know that the Catholic Church, and she alone, teaches the entire body of doctrine left us by Christ, that other forms of Christianity have maintained the truth in those points where they kept to the teaching of the Catholic Church, but fell into hopeless chaos where they departed from her—all this we know. Why are we dumb about it?

We are not dumb on any subject that interests us. Bring your watch to the watchmaker and you will not find it difficult to get him to tell you all about it, though you may have considerable difficulty in stopping him! Listen to men in the tram coming back from a football match and see if they are dumb. They must speak about it and exchange views on the tactics and success or failure of their side. Meet a man who has won the sweep and he cannot think or speak of anything else. It comes simply to this: let a man be interested in a subject and there is nothing more natural in the world than that he will speak about that subject on every possible occasion.



Now, where the faith is concerned, a friend of Christ should be just like that. He has found a treasure in his faith; it is a source of such solid joy to him to be a Catholic and to have the assurance that what he is taught in the Church is bedrock certainty. It quite overwhelms him to realize, and not merely to believe, the fact that Our Lord is in the Blessed Sacrament; that sins, no matter how enormous, are completely forgiven in a good Confession; and that Mary is, in very truth, his Mother. All this is reality for the fervent Catholic. If men will speak out on their favorite topic, their work or their sport, so also should the Catholic who is so keen on his faith that he cannot keep silent about it. It is, literally, the “gospel,” that means “good news.” A Catholic has such an amount of good tidings to give his fellow-men. He knows so well where to find true happiness that he longs to tell them, to impress on them that they are missing what he has discovered—a pearl of great price.

That was the spirit of the first apostles. They were flung into prison and scourged severely. Then they were let free, but with the proviso that they should no more preach Christ. Yet, “they came forth from the council chamber rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer for the name of Christ.” Without a moment’s loss, defying every warning, they began to preach with all their accustomed zeal. Why? “We cannot but speak of those things which we have heard and seen.” They had good tidings of great joy; they saw the crying need of the souls perishing around them; Christ had commissioned them to preach, and nothing could prevent them. They must spread the good news.

That is the spirit of the Catholic apostle today. Religion is part of himself. He does not confine it, as his less fortunate non-Catholic friend is forced to do, to a respectable attendance at a fashionable church on a Sunday. He lives his religion and wants to tell the world about it.

Some time ago, a Catholic layman was sitting at dinner between a priest and a non-Catholic. There were several other non-Catholics at the table. “Father,” said our friend, “these men think we Catholics pay money to you priests to forgive us our sins in Confession and to grant us permission to sin again. Will you please tell them the truth about it!”

Many non-Catholics who are living in our midst are painfully conscious that we Catholics have a reality in our religion that they lack. It is lamentable that a Catholic should be dumb about his faith!

You will find men who are shy about speaking on religion, who are afraid to face a difficulty against the faith. Often, they prefer to pass it over with a joke, a smile, or a shrug of the shoulders. It is lamentable, because often your silence may mean a soul lost to the true faith. Our Lord tells you to be like a city seated on a hill or like a



candle set up high on a candlestick. Do not be dumb. Share your good tidings with others. Often others are pitifully ignorant, and would bless you if you enlightened them. Speak the words of God: He has rested on your tongue in Holy Communion to disseminate the truth and to continue to broadcast His divine message to the world. Be filled with pride if the accusation is against you that was hurled in the face of Peter, “Thy speech doth discover thee” that thou art an apostle of Christ.

It is not only among non-Catholics that the apostle will watch for his opportunity. You will very often come across Catholics who are careless about their religious duties. They have got into the way of neglecting the Sacraments; they are victims, it may well be, of viciously sinful habits. Now, when you meet Catholics, even casually—on a train journey, or at a football match, or when you get into talk while you are both taking shelter from the rain—at any time or place watch your opportunity to make your tongue an instrument of your apostolate.

You have been accustomed on these occasions to discuss the war, or the price of foodstuffs, or an article in that day’s paper, or a talk you heard last night on the radio, or a railway accident that has just occurred—anything that happens to come to your mind. Now, if you are an apostle, the thought that will certainly come to your mind is that that chance companion of yours has an immortal soul. That is the thought that would come instinctively to Our Lord’s mind if He were in your place.

Quick upon that first thought will follow an anxiety about the state of that soul. You may never meet that man again. If it should happen that he is at this moment separated from God by a sinful life, this is your one chance to affect him.

Even the mere possibility that he is in danger will enkindle your zeal. So watch your opportunity tactfully to bring about the conversation to the topic nearest your heart and of most importance to your companion. Often you will succeed in making him think. Often he will take from a layman or woman advice or exhortation that he would not listen to from a priest. When he finds that a lay person like himself is so keen about his soul and the supernatural, and so anxious to speak about it, often the discovery first surprises him, and then leads him to think and examine himself and begin to wonder if, after all, sin is worth the price. Grace has begun to act on him! Little by little, you may well hope he will come back to God, because you have used your tongue as an instrument of the apostolate.

Never be discouraged by apparent failure. Archbishop Ullathorne once visited the convicts on Norfolk Island. A quarter of an hour before he left the place, he came upon a poor man who was leading a sinful life. The time was short, but, with all the eloquence of his zealous heart, the Bishop spoke to the man and tried to persuade him to change his life. Then came the signal for him to leave, and he came away



feeling that he had left the sinner still hardened in his sin. His words, so he thought, had no effect on his hearer. Sixteen months later he came again, quite by accident, back to the island, to find, to his joy, that the man had thought over what he had told him and had changed his ways. Ultimately, he regained his freedom and became a thoroughly good man—through the apostolate of the tongue.

II.

We may begin this second part of our paper with a little parable. Let me suppose that you are retiring from a business house where you have worked for twenty-five years, and that the other members of the staff subscribe a check for a hundred pounds and present it to you as a mark of their esteem and appreciation. Now, what would you think of yourself if you repaid their kindness by using that money in a way designed to undermine the reputation of that business house? Would you embark on a campaign of propaganda against your friends and use the gift they had given you to spread lies about them? The supposition seems monstrous, but it is verified, and verified in the case of man's greatest Benefactor and most loving Father.

For man is the tongue of creation. He alone has the power to praise God. Intelligent speech is given him by God for the express purpose of lifting up his voice in praise and thanks. He can use this very instrument, and he does, in ways that are abominable, for they are evidence of the blackest ingratitude.

With his tongue, man should praise God. Does he? One cannot help but know that the frightful habit is very prevalent of using Christ's sacred Name lightly, as an explosive, when a man is in a fit of temper. That Name, which is above all names, before which even the devils bow in adoration! Young people in their teens pick it up from their elders and come to think it is manly! So, the poison spreads. So, you use your tongue, given you for the sublime work of praising God, to blaspheme and teach to others this shameful habit. What a sorry advertisement for the Church you are to the non-Catholics with whom you associate!

Then, there is all that can be grouped under that comprehensive term "bad talk" or, less euphoniously, "dirty talk." In another place, we have appealed to our Irish Catholics to unite in a great "Campaign of Reparation" to the Sacred Heart.

Part of that campaign should undoubtedly be a war on bad talk. An eminent ecclesiastic in this country maintains that more than ninety per cent of the sins against purity are traceable to bad and immoral talk. One often wonders if the man



who tells an impure story or makes smutty jokes has even a dim realization of the possible extent of the evil he is doing. You tell that story and raise a laugh. Why? Again, partly at least, because you imagine that it is “manly!” Now, where does the manliness come in? You can find mud anywhere, and there is nothing very glorious about scraping it off the streets. So, too, you can readily find a cad who is ready with his filthy talk, but the man is the person who will stand up to this sort of thing and tell the storyteller what he thinks of him.

That bad story will go from one to another. It will enkindle the imaginations of those who hear it—already prone enough, goodness knows, to think about these things. It has been known so to fascinate the minds of young people that they were driven ultimately to an immoral life. “Behold,” says Saint James, “what a small fire, what a great wood it enkindleth.” That bad talk is like setting a match to a fuse. There is sure to be a conflagration. Who is to cope with it? Where will end the responsibility of the storyteller, or the man who so lightly tossed off that filthy expression? This, forsooth, is his way of praising God. This is his use of that God-given gift of speech.

Some time ago, a priest was staying in a country hotel. He got into bed at about ten o’clock at night, and presently a group of young fellows collected outside his window to talk and amuse themselves. It was a summer night and the window was open, and the priest could not help overhearing the conversation. It was nauseating. They were young country lads, in a Catholic town, standing actually under the shadow of the Blessed Sacrament! One slimy joke followed another and each was met with a howl of laughter. This was their way of praising God. This was how they chose to use their tongues—tongues upon which God had rested in Holy Communion.

Of course, that is only an isolated instance. Readers of this little book will be able to supply others by the score. Now, what is to be done about it? Souls are being corrupted by this sort of thing. The apostle of the Sacred Heart cannot remain indifferent.

The Scotch have a proverb, “Sweep before your own door and the whole street will be clean.” So, if something practical is to be done to meet this evil of filthy talk, I would say that your own conversation, to start with, should be above reproach. You have read of the dignity of your tongue and of the sublime purposes for which you received it from God. Hence, begin by keeping your own tongue clean. If you have contracted this vile habit, make war on it from this moment. Accuse yourself of it in Confession with deep sincerity and a firm purpose of amendment. If again you slip and use improper talk or take Our Lord’s Sacred Name irreverently, punish yourself. Do without a smoke; do not read the Herald tonight; perform an act of kindness that



costs you a good deal, if possible, for somebody whom you do not like. Train yourself in the use of a “harmless explosive”—“heavens,” “holy smoke,” or even “hell!” so it will come spontaneously to your lips at moments of anger or surprise. Do this sort of thing consistently for a while each time you misuse your tongue, and, little by little, you will conquer the habit. That victory is a definite gain for your own soul and for the souls of others: it is a very certain advance in our Campaign of Reparation.

Then, if this sort of thing is going on around you—at your work or club or at the street corners—do have the courage of your convictions and speak out! Crush human respect and strike a blow for Christ! The “smart” people may laugh at you: never mind. In their hearts, they respect you and acknowledge that you are right. It is always the way with hypocrisy to try to justify itself in the eyes of the world. That was Pilate’s maneuver, when in the same breath he declared Our Lord innocent, condemned Him to death, and then, with the water dripping from his hands, stood before the Jews avowing that he was not taking the responsibility!

If we could get even a few boys and girls, men and women, in our factories, in our clubs, to unite and create a right public opinion on the subject of bad talk, what a fine band of apostles they would be! If the smutty remark does untold harm by spreading, the firmness and manliness of the apostle, too, can do untold good. If you come forward and silence the foul-mouthed storyteller and make him ashamed of himself (even though he will try to cover his tracks and turn the laugh against you), you will save others from following his example. One or two in a room or office can be a most powerful influence towards stamping out talk of this sort. Have the team spirit; help each other; let it be seen that you keep your own tongue clean, and then fearlessly wage war, and victory will come—gradually. We are not dumb. Speak out, and never be afraid to show that you consider filthy talk an insult.

A young girl was working in a factory and, on the occasion of her marriage, her girl friends collected ten pounds to offer as a gift. She was a poor girl and ten pounds would have been most acceptable. However, she refused to take it. Why? Because, as she told them, she would not touch the money of girls who indulged in filthy talk such as she had been condemned to listen to from them during the past five years. They told her plainly that she was a fool. They did not mean any harm by their talk. The girl remained adamant. In their hearts, they knew she was right. She succeeded in making them ashamed of themselves. The Sacred Heart, for Whom she had made this big sacrifice, did not allow Himself to be outdone in generosity. He never does.



A final practical hint for this part of our Campaign of Reparation is to spread this pamphlet. It will speak, one hopes, when you are silent. Possess yourself of a few copies and put them in the way of those who are given to bad talk. Sow the seed and trust Our Lord to give the increase.

You have often, I suppose, “made the Stations of the Cross.” You have prayed devoutly at each Station as you contemplated in detail the sufferings of Our Lord. You have thought about the men who scourged Him, made a mockery of Him, and crucified Him.

Then you have, possibly, walked out of the Church and joined with those very persecutors and helped scourge Him! How? By your uncharitable talk. “Why persecutest thou Me?” Our Lord asks you when you indulge in this habit. “As long as you did it to one of these My least brethren, you did it to Me.” We saw that the second great function of the tongue is to give comfort to those that are in sorrow—as Christ Our Lord did. The evil opposed to this kindness is uncharitableness. Just as the tongue plays a most important part in shedding the light of happiness in people’s hearts, so the misuse of this little instrument can be responsible for much misery in our neighbor’s life.

We do not insist sufficiently with ourselves upon the truth that what we say to our neighbor, or about him, is regarded by Our Lord as done to Himself. True, indeed, Christ may be hidden under a very effective disguise in the person of your neighbor. You will meet folk who are selfish, uncharitable, sour-tempered, boring, and unjust. For all that, Christ takes as done to Himself what you do to them. The more effective the disguise the more meritorious is your spirit of faith in penetrating through it.

You consider that your uncharitableness is justified because you have treated that person with kindness and you have met with black ingratitude in return. Look again at the Model. “He went around doing good,” and men crucified Him for it. Or, you will say, you have a right to speak of another’s faults because they have accused you in the wrong. They did that to your Model, and He lifted up bleeding eyes on Calvary to pray for them. What of His rights? Think of the corrupt Annas and Caiphas; recall the sensuous Herod; remember the time-server Pilate—for these He prayed, “Father, forgive them!” Now He teaches explicitly that the measure of His love and forgiveness is to determine ours. “Love one another as I have loved you.”

Missioners are sometimes told when they approach a person who is careless about going to the Sacraments, “Sacraments? What is the use? There is so-and-so running every day to the Church and he or she has a tongue like a razor.” And, it is true.



There is no consistency. “By the tongue,” again to quote Saint James, “we bless God and the Father, and by it we curse men, who are made after the likeness of God.” True religion suffers much from this travesty of piety.

Two people have been life-long friends. The uncharitable person comes between them: throws out an unkind remark that sows the seeds of suspicion, and perhaps severs that friendship. He has done that to Christ. A man and wife are living in peace and harmony. Your busybody, jealous of their happiness, spreads a lie or brings a tale along to one of the two, with the possible result that great unhappiness is born into that erstwhile happy home. That has been taken by Our Lord as done to Himself. Or you have heard some secret sin of another and you gloat in recounting it to your bosom companion. To make known a serious hidden fault of another, without necessity, is a mortal sin. “Hast thou heard evil of another?” asks the Wise Man with a touch of humor. “Let it die within thee, trusting that it will not burst thee.” That is a salutary piece of counsel for many a person who prides himself or herself on being “so religious!”

Then there is harsh criticism. Self-righteous folk often develop in themselves a very repellent character through their constant faultfinding, continuous airing of their grievances, and unending comments on the faults or inefficiency of others. Underneath all this, does there lurk a subtle innuendo? Does a critic of this sort infer his own superiority? Could it be that he implicitly invites you to unite with him in thanking God that he is not as the rest of men?

Not only in what we say about another, but also in what we say to another, we can offend against the second great function of the tongue. Who has not had to complain of a cutting remark made again very often by “religious” people who are sadly lacking in the sweetness of Christ? Who has not noted the want of a little word of encouragement or appreciation when one is trying to please and do one’s best? A husband comes in tired after the day and his wife has a little surprise to cheer him, but he will not see or recognize it or bother to show his appreciation. The result is stony silence and keen disappointment. The pity of it is that we are so reluctant to give a word of praise to another. We value it so highly ourselves—so does that other person. See Christ in the other person and you will remember to offer a little word that will make all the difference.

There are, however, times when charity postulates silence. Suppose you have a headache or you did not sleep last night. That is most interesting to you, but remember others do not share the same interest. Hide your small pains and aches,



and, especially at such a time, deliberately cultivate cheerfulness and thoughtfulness for others. He for Whose sake you do it will not allow Himself to be outdone in generosity. He never does.

Many people complain that they cannot pray. One would like to suggest that the cause of their distractions and dryness in prayer may be their want of control of the tongue. "There is a time to speak and a time to keep silence." To abstain from talking and to exercise self-control was the third use of the tongue touched upon earlier in this paper. Now, it is certain that a dissipated life and a deep spirit of prayer are diametrically opposed one to the other. A love of gossip, of the tittle-tattle that happens every day, and a life of close union with God in prayer can never obtain. That is why the saints, who loved God and found all their happiness in conversing with Him in prayer, invariably avoided contact with the world except where obedience or charity demanded it. That is why Our Lord loved the desert places. That is why the Founders of the Religious Orders, whose members must first and before all else be men and women of prayer, were so exact in enjoining a rule of silence and, as far as can be, of seclusion from the world. All this points to the truth we want to emphasize—that silence has a close connection with prayer, and that if our prayer is not what we desire it to be, and expect it should be, the reason may very well be found in our want of control of the gift of speech.

Men have practically eliminated space and time. Radio, Press, Cinema—all conspire to satisfy the innate passion in man for news and excitement. It is not so easy to detach oneself from all this bustle and give oneself up determinedly to the quiet and seclusion required for converse with God in prayer. Not so easy, and therefore not done, and because not done there is distraction and apathy about the life of prayer and the intimacy with Our Lord which prayer opens up to the soul that seeks it, and that sets itself systematically to live in the atmosphere calculated to foster it. For, to foster that atmosphere, there is no more potent influence than control of the tongue. Do not complain that your prayer is dry if you do not practice silence. Nobody expects the thermometer to rise in a place where the temperature is decreasing.

What a travesty men are making today in their misuse of the tongue! We see and hear blasphemy without parallel against God and His Church. Men are using their tongues to goad their fellow men to an insane and satanic hatred of everything that is holy. Lying tongues inject their poisonous fangs into even the receptive minds of little children, teaching them to mock at religion and laugh at morality. High priests of modern atheism proclaim to all who have ears to hear that religion is the opium of the people: that man is little better than an animal after all: that he may as well acquiesce in this state of things, settle down and live like any other animal. God? No, there is no God except "massed humanity." Hell? A bogey invented by priests to



retain their hold on the credulous people who listen to their tales. Hereafter? No such thing: a myth at which sensible men have long since learned to smile, to be put in the same class as stories of Ali Baba or Santa Claus!

“What a small fire, what a great wood it enkindleth!” Who can form even a rough estimate of the harm done by this campaign of diabolical propaganda carried on by the tongue? If you keep on saying a thing, no matter how foolish, and if you say it with sufficient earnestness and with a show of argument, however specious, you will be sure to find people to listen to you and to begin to think that perhaps there is something in what you say. Now, if there was no God, the sinner might give free rein to his passions. If there is no hell, he can stretch out arms in welcome to sin, and can do this with impunity. If hereafter is a fairy tale, why let him be logical and make the most of the life he has now, seeing that this is his one chance of enjoying himself. So, the evil tongues of lying propagandists gain a hearing, and men are led away from God and sin spreads like a plague. “Man when he was in honor did not understand; he compared himself to the brute beasts and became like to them.”

All this is a challenge to the apostle of the Sacred Heart. He will use his tongue to proclaim God’s praises and to spread abroad the fire of His love. He will always be on the watch for his chance. Father Doyle, coming home late one night, accosted a poor girl in the street. “Go home, child,” he said gently. “Don’t offend Jesus. He loves you.” A simple word destined many years later to lead, in the mysterious ways of God’s Providence, to the conversion of that sinful girl.

A priest and a lay gentleman, a non-Catholic, got into conversation in a railway carriage. During the journey the priest said, “Did it ever occur to you to ask yourself why God put you in this world?” “It did, indeed,” came the answer, and he proceeded to give various reasons that had suggested themselves to him by way of answer. We are put here to help our fellow man, to be kind to others, and so forth. The priest then proceeded to tell him what we Catholics hold to be the purpose of our existence. We belong absolutely to God. He created us. Therefore we exist for one only purpose—to do His Will. Riches, success, health, long or short life—all these things are secondary. Nothing is of real importance except doing God’s Will, because for that we were created. The non-Catholic listened with the greatest attention. Presently he came to his station. “I’ve been deeply interested, sir,” he said, “and I wish I was not getting out here. But I’m going to see one of your priests about this.” Did he? Perhaps he did: perhaps not. At any rate, this is the sort of thing that is meant by the apostolate of the tongue. Speak out. Learn from the dynamic energy of the enemies of Christ. Where the seed will fall you know not; but what you do know for certain is that a generous God never allows Himself to be outdone in generosity, from all that we have seen it is clear that the gift of speech is like a river flowing



through the world. If the waters are clean, they cleanse all that comes in contact with them. If the waters are murky and muddy, they will leave behind them traces of the mud as they flow along. Now, to ensure the waters are clean, it is of first importance that the sources should be purified. The source from which flows the gift of speech is the heart. Hence, let the heart be pure and the words of the mouth will be pure also and will come forth freighted with love of God and zeal for the neighbor.

For the heart of man to be purified thus, it must make contact with the Sacred Heart. From out of the Sacred Heart, there flows love of the Father, kindness for men, zeal for souls, and compassion for sinners. All these are the “waters of the Savior’s fountains,” and these will flow into the heart of the apostle if he makes contact with Our Lord. This, in turn, will ensure that the words of his mouth will be “as the words of God,” for this contact will have a cleansing effect on the sources from which his words proceed. His speech will betray him that he is an apostle of Jesus Christ.

This contact is made and maintained by two very powerful instruments.

- Sacrifice. By sacrifice, the heart is freed from the slavery of sin and the pressure of worldliness.
- Prayer. By prayer, the soul is attached to God, to the Sacred Heart.

Sacrifice detaches from the world, and prayer attaches to Christ. This detachment and this attachment, in turn, produce the purification of heart necessary if we are to be apostles by the use of our tongues. These were the two great means of apostolate used by Our Lord in His redeeming action on Calvary. There He is suffering, sacrificing Himself for the sins of men, and there, too, He is praying for men, “Father, forgive them.” Prayer built upon sacrifice has strength and an efficacy that nothing can resist.

When prayer and sacrifice are found united in a heart, they send cleansing streams into that heart. These streams overflow their banks: the thoughts of the heart give birth to the words on the lips. A heart that is cleansed is thus the source of a speech that echoes the words of God. These words, in turn, flow through the world, striking compunction in the heart of sinners, encouraging the despondent, singing God’s praises, spreading the fire of a divine zeal for the souls redeemed by the blood of Christ.

“If there could be regret in heaven,” wrote Cardinal Merry del Val, “it would be that there is nothing more left to do for Jesus.” With the little instrument concerning which these pages have been written we can do much for God and for souls. We are



not dumb. From out a purified heart we can bring forth purified and purifying words. And the efficacy of such words to influence others aright, to stem the tidal wave of sin and irreligion, to bring light to sinners to understand the evil of their ways, to change them into friends of the Sacred Heart—the efficacy of the right use of the gift of speech what man can measure?

It is like a bridle, says Saint James, that controls the entire body. It is like the helm of a ship that governs the whole course of the great liner. Let it be but pure itself and purified, and it will shape the character of the apostle in such a manner that he will be fitted for the high work for which today there is such a crying need. That is the work of bringing back light to a world groping in darkness because it has rejected Christ, and Purity to a world that is fast sinking to animalism because it has deliberately obliterated from its mind the memory of Mary Immaculate. To a world that is famishing with hunger because it has desecrated the Tabernacle and spurned the Blessed Sacrament the apostolate of the tongue can do much to bring back love—the love of the Sacred Heart and the true love of one's fellow-men—and with love the “peace of God that surpasseth all understanding.”

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