

SOUND OF SILENCE

Me and My Big Mouth | Listen with the ear of the heart (St. Benedict)

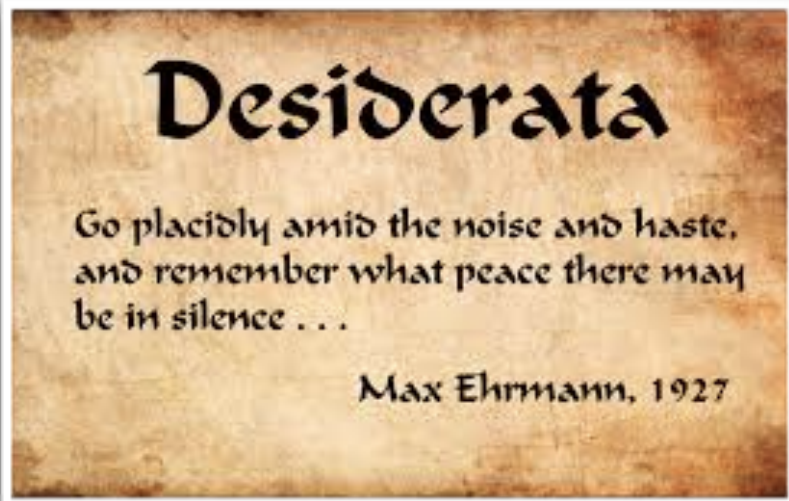
"We have two choices with our words - either bless, or to curse" (James 3:1-12)

Tongue Twister

"Pad kid poured curd pulled cod." Researchers from MIT say this is the world's most difficult tongue twister. Have a go. If you can say it ten times you may get a prize.

Taming the Tongue

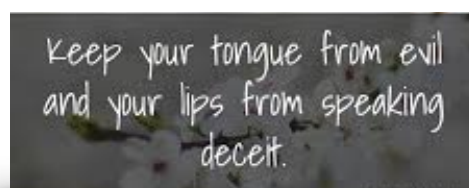
The Letter of St James 3:1-12 is going to show us how the tongue is a test, so we must train the tongue in God's way. Because though it's a myth that the tongue is the strongest muscle, it is the most powerful. James illustrates the power of the tongue on two analogies: a horse's bit and the ship's rudder. In both images we learn that the direction of the horse and the ship are determined by steering a small bit and a rudder. James teaches us an important principle, if we control what we say; we can control the rest of what we do. Hence, the direction of our entire life. He warns us that the tongue is a fire capable of far reaching destruction. Unlike an axe or chainsaw, the tongue can land one blow with destructive repercussions far beyond the initial act. The whole course of one's life can be affected by one statement. Defamation, false accusations, slander, gossips, verbal abuse, etc.



What tastes better than it smells?

Your tongue!

They can't be seen with the naked eye, but you have up to 4,000 taste buds by the time you're an adult, each with up to 150 taste receptors. You have less taste buds as a child and more sensitive to sweet taste which might explain why children prefer candy to cabbage. Our tongue is as unique to you as your fingerprints. It's a combination of eight muscles intertwined like an elephant's trunk so it can move in any direction. They are the only muscles in the body that move independent of the skeleton but like other muscles the tongue is trainable, though it never gets tired (don't stick out your tongue at the person next to you).

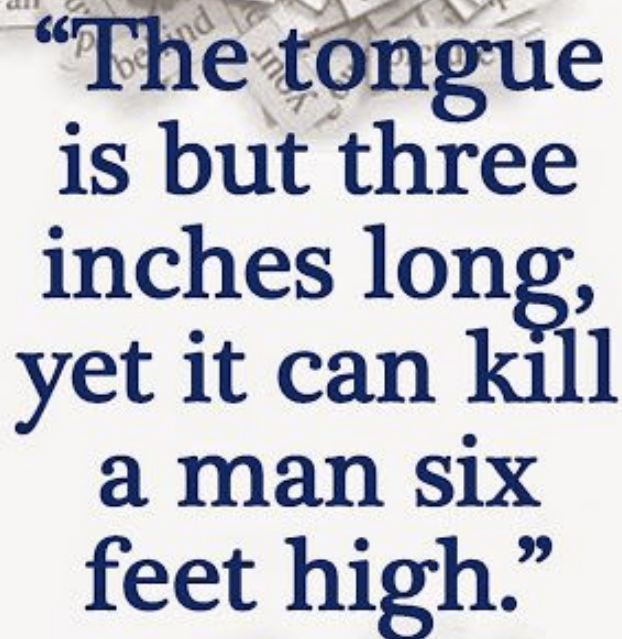


The Deadly Tongue:

St James says remember the tongue **DIRECTS** your life, like a bit or a rudder. One or two little words can shape the whole course of our life - for better or worse. We might call it a little white lie on our Resume, but when it's found out we lose the job. We may say, "I'm only joking," but the best way to kill a marriage is lots of little lies. How many churches or ministries split because someone couldn't hold in criticism or push back on gossip? The right word at the right time can open the right door, or that tweet you tweeted or the email you clicked reply to all, can ruin someone's reputation for good. Is God directing the muscle that directs your life? Next James says that the tongue can **DESTROY** your life, like a fire or a wild animal. Words can destroy a relationship, divide a church, cause division within ministry members or tear a nation apart. Think about those forest fires, when that was the biggest story on the media - millions of acres destroyed, people killed, homes devastated. Huge fires start with a little spark. (James 3:5) Think about what we might call a "heated exchange," and what the damage that can do. Collateral damage! St James says an untamed tongue can bite like a poisonous beast. Psalm 140:3 says evil people *"They make their tongue sharp as a snake's and under their lips is the venom of vipers."* St James warns us the tongue is a fire, "a world of iniquity." (James 3:6). World is *kosmos* meaning a system, a culture, a whole world gets created by the lies or negative words we speak and it gets quickly out of control and pollutes everything. In today's cyber language, "it has gone viral". A person's words gone unchecked could destroy a friendship, devastate a family, and discredit the leaders of a whole church, really quickly. If you get pulled into it. Whether you meant to or not, the smoke damage might never go away. The tongue can destroy everything. Smoke rises up and cause others to cough. People get affected.

James teaches us an important principle, if we control what we say; we can control the rest of what we do. Hence, the direction of our entire life. He warns us that the tongue is a fire capable of far reaching destruction. Unlike an axe or chainsaw, the tongue can land one blow with destructive repercussions far beyond the initial act. The whole course of one's life can be affected by one statement. Defamation, false accusations, slander, gossips, verbal abuse, etc. Not many of us should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle. If we put bits into the mouths of horses to make them obey us, we guide their whole bodies. Or look at ships: though they are so large that it takes strong winds to drive them, yet they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs. So also the tongue is a small member, yet it boasts of great exploits.



**"The tongue
is but three
inches long,
yet it can kill
a man six
feet high."**

— Japanese Proverb

How great a forest is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a fire. The tongue is placed among our members as a world of iniquity; it stains the whole body, sets on fire the cycle of nature, and is itself set on fire by hell. For every species of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by the human species, but no one can tame the tongue - a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse those who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this ought not to be so. Does a spring pour forth from the same opening both fresh and salt water? Can a fig tree, my brothers and sisters, yield olives, or a grapevine figs? No more can salt water yield fresh water (James 3:1-12).

Physical

Why is it so deadly? Well **physically** speaking, few places are more infested with harmful bacteria than the human mouth. 600 different types, second only to your digestive and urinary tract with 1 million bacteria for every drop of saliva. Of course many of them are good bacteria, but most toilets are cleaner than your mouth.

Spiritual

Doctors ask us to stick out our tongue as a health indicator. How about **spiritually**? The Bible directly links the mouth to the heart. "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." The opposite is realised at every stage of life. Words can hurt, even kill if not used responsibly. Sirach 28:17 says, "The blow of a whip raises a welt, but a blow of the tongue crushes the bones." What's on your tongue tells what's in your heart. The Psalmist (141:3) implores, "*Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over my lips.*" Sometimes biting our tongue causes less pain than letting it loose. Whether you use many words or few, the way you say it - has power. Just the tone of your words can change what has been said? Really. Like I can say "Really ..." Or "Oh Really?" Or *Really?!*" Someone say that words are like nitro-glycerine they can blow up bridges or heal hearts.

Our words can hurt or heal, build up or tear down, bring wisdom or wound others. The Bible says the little tongue is the most dangerous in the whole world. How many wars have started as a war of words? In the Talmud, the Rabbis likened the tongue to a sharpened arrow, a lethal weapon that can wound at long distance.

There are seven powerful "I AM" statement of Jesus in the Gospel of John

"I am the bread of life." (John 6:35,41,48,51) As bread sustains physical life, so Christ offers and sustains spiritual life.

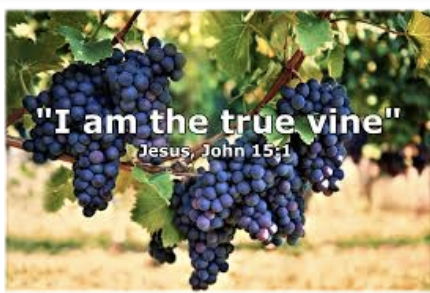
"I am the light of the world." (John 8: 12) To a world lost in darkness, Christ offers Himself as a guide.

"I am the door of the sheep." (John 10:7,9) Jesus protects His followers as shepherds protect their flocks from predators.

"I am the resurrection and the life." (John 11:25) Death is not the final word for those in Christ.

"I am the good shepherd." (John 10:11,14) Jesus is committed to caring and watching over those who are His.

"I am the way, the truth, and the life." (John 14:6) Jesus is the source of all truth and knowledge about God.



Two Choices: Bless or Curse

James 3:9 shows us we have two choices with our words - either **BLESS**, or to **CURSE**. And the Bible has much to say about this, with words about blessings and curses occurring almost 600 times. Since the universe was created by God's Word, as his image bearers our words are charged with supernatural power either from God or Satan. The Patriarchs and Prophets knew the power of words to affect an individual's life or a nation's destiny from generation to generation - for better or worse.

Genesis 12:1-3 describes the comprehensive sevenfold blessing that I will make of you a great nation

- I will bless you
- And make your name great
- You will be a blessing
- I will bless those who bless you
- The one who curse you I will curse
- In you all the families of the earth will be blessed

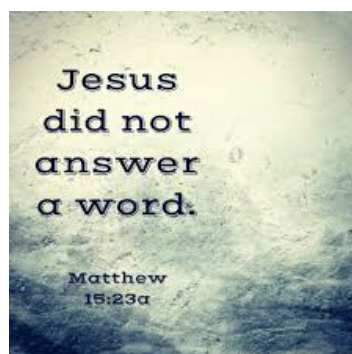
There is incalculable power in your words, especially the ones you speak about and say to yourself. Very often people don't need anyone else to curse them, they're doing a great job of it themselves. They do it all the time.

"I am the true vine." (John 15:1,5) By attaching ourselves to Christ, we enable His life to flow in and through us. Then we cannot help but bear fruit that will honour the Father.

Christ never said anything about himself that was not positive.

What about you and me? When we say, "I am," what usually comes next? Aside from the external markers that for me would say "I am a husband, a father, a grandfather, a teacher." Would we say, "I am hopeless, I am a failure, a disappointment, a loser, a waste of space..." Or would you say what God says about us? When you feel down, do we say things like, "I wish I were dead. What's the point of living? I'm never going to make it." That kind of negative words are a self-imposed curse, a self-fulfilling prophecy. God is determined to bless you, but you can call down curses on yourself or others intentionally or unintentionally - even as a Catholic.

The words you are using have creative power, setting us and others in our world up for poverty or provision, failure or a future, fear or faith, defeat or victory, sickness or health mentally and physically. We can break out from every curse, and live blessed to be a blessing. God wants to release the positive power of your words to bless not curse, to help and not hurt; to encourage not dishearten; to praise not pull down. So what's coming out of our mouth? (Or from the fingers on the keyboard?) Review the past for a little while. Have you been building up, or burning down? Pouring out like a fresh spring or salty sea water that drives everyone crazy? (James 3:12).



Will we bless or curse?

St James says God has had it when we praise him but curse our brothers and sisters. (James 3:9) If we lie, abuse, enrage, decry, flirt, gossip, slander, criticise, insult, flatter, deceive, make false promises - God can't stand it. It's bad water, the wrong fruit. Yuk! What is most profound is the more we praise, the less we moan. The more *We Bless God* and lift Him up, the less our tongue gets used to pull people down.

The Jewish people would pray eighteen Benedictions, three times a day out loud. Each one ended with a Blessing. Ask the Holy Spirit to take control because if He directs our tongues, He directs our whole life!

What can we do this coming week, to practice taming the tongue?

Re-read once again James 3:1-12. Listen fully to what St James said that we need to tame our tongue. "I am a man of unclean lips" (Isaiah 6:5). We need the Holy Spirit's water to flow over this salty tongue and wash our mouth clean. Because right now there is so much to be negative about in the world isn't there? We can so easily dive right into that.

But the antidote to that poison, the way the church has tried to deal with it over the years is this - **SILENCE**. Learning to be quiet. To not have to speak. To not have to say the first thing or have the last word. Again, St James said, "quick to listen, slow to speak ..." (James 1:19) That's hard for us. It is the other way round. We are quick talkers, trigger happy. We have said so many things we wish we never have said.

"A good marriage would be between a blind wife and a deaf husband"

- Michel de Montaigne, French writer (1533-1592).

(The blind wife cannot see her husband's faults and the deaf husband cannot hear his wife's complaints)

"Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies." Psalm 34:12-13

