

*Readings*

Sir 27:4-7

Ps 92:2-3, 13-14, 15-16

1 Cor 15:54-58

Lk 6:39-45

---

Liam T. O'Doherty, O.S.A.  
*Church of Saint Nicholas of Tolentine*  
*Bronx, New York*

Today's Gospel is the continuation of Jesus' Sermon on the Plain that we have listened to for the past few Sundays.

Listen again to Jesus' last sentence in today's Gospel: *From the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaks*. He's saying that what is in the heart sooner or later shows itself in what we say.

When we go for our annual checkup, the doctor always looks at our tongue. "Say 'aah'!" The tongue tells the doctor a lot.

The tongue, that is, our speech, is a theme of today's readings. Today's readings from Sirach and Luke's Gospel speak about the power of the tongue, the power of speech. They are about the tongue as a sword and an indicator of health.

First, the tongue can be a sword.

Think back over the last day. How many people have we touched with our words? With our words, we can give comfort, strength, encouragement, praise. We can sing with our tongues to the glory of God, or we can hurt people, destroy reputations, spread suspicion and slander.

Our words can clarify and clear the air. They can deceive and create confusion. Most of our interaction with the world is through words. In 2025, those words might not travel through the air as sound waves, but move hundreds or thousands of miles instantaneously as texts or tweets or emails. Still, they have the power to heal or to hurt.

Harsh words can cut into the heart and soul of a person. Those wounds from another's words do not heal that quickly. We have all experienced that. That old saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me," is a lie. We all know the terrible terror of the untamed tongue.

What if we steal that person's reputation, their good name? Can we ever give that back? Can we call back the words we said as they get repeated and continue to travel to places we never dreamed of? They are out of our control. Often things we put in an email or a social media post – once sent, they take on a life of their own! No way to get them back!

The tongue is only a few inches long, but it can do a great deal of damage and create a great deal of hurt.

The Book of Sirach says in the next chapter after today's reading: *Many have fallen by the sword, but many more by the tongue.* The tongue is indeed a sword.

The tongue is an indicator of the state of our physical health. That's why the doctor checks it. But it's also an indicator of the state of our health spiritually.

Again, Jesus' last words from today's Gospel: *From the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaks.* These words tell us that how we speak to and about others is a pretty good indicator of what is happening in our hearts.

The Good News is that the Holy Spirit who dwells in our hearts desires to form our hearts in His Love. To the extent we have opened our hearts to allow the grace of God, his wisdom, his love, and his power to form our hearts in his ways of gentleness, compassion, and mercy, we will be able to express those virtues to others in our conversations and interactions with them.

Lent is upon us. Ash Wednesday is three days from now.

It's time to turn away from trying to remove the splinter from another's eye and concentrate on getting rid of the wooden beam in our own eye. Can we see clearly enough to lead each other gently? What is the condition of our heart? Is ours the heart of a follower of Jesus, or a self-absorbed heart – a heart of darkness? We know what's in our hearts through the things that come out of it. And it's all revealed in the power of speech, our words.

Are we using that gift and its power to heal and set free? Or do we use it to tear down and destroy? Let's not forget the power of the good word, the healing word, the helping word, when we let our words be the word of the Lord to others. A good word, a Christian word to another, has an effect that will last a lifetime.

Jesus goes further than asking us to regulate our speech or writing. He wants us to look into our hearts, our inner self, and find areas of growth. Allowing him and his word to penetrate our hearts will provide light for the course. Recognizing our weaknesses, limitations, biases, and sins will help us be patient with others while allowing us to grow into the persons God has made us to be. Along the journey, we come to the realization, ever new, that God has been merciful to us; it is this same mercy that He wants us to share with others.