

+A preacher was making his rounds to his parishioners on a bicycle when he came upon a little boy trying to sell a lawn mower. "How much do you want for the mower?" asked the preacher. "I just want enough money to go out and buy me a bike", said the little boy.

After a moment of consideration, the preacher asked: "Will you take my bike in trade for it?" The little boy asked if he could try it out first, and after riding the bike around a little while said: "Mister, you've got yourself a deal."

The preacher took the mower and began to try to crank it. Pulling on the string a few times with no response from the mower, the preacher called the little boy over: "I can't get this mower to start." The little boy said: "That's because you have to cuss at it to get it started."

The preacher said: "I am a minister, and I cannot cuss. It has been so long since I have been saved that I do not even remember how to cuss." The little boy looked at him happily and said: "Just keep pulling' on that string. It'll come back to ya!"

Jesus says that "From the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaks." In other words, what is in the heart sooner or later overflows in speech. Whenever we go for a medical checkup, one of the things a physician will do is examine the tongue. "Say 'ah!'" Looking at the tongue can tell the doctor a great deal.

Jesus the great physician may ask us to say "Ah" to inspect our tongue for other reasons... Today's readings from Sirach and the Gospel speak about the power of the tongue, the power of speech.

Jesus and Sirach show us that the words a person chooses to speak are a window through which to see and know his/her heart. According to statisticians, the average man speaks about 25, 000 words a day and the average woman, 80,000...just kidding, 30,000; from the first "good morning" to the last "good night," each engages in approximately 30 conversations daily.

Given those figures, the average person spends about 15 years or about one-fifth of his/her life talking. This would fill a 50 page book each day. Over the span of one year, the average person's words would fill 132 books, each containing at least 400 pages.

Armed with this statistical information, we turn now to the prompting of Jesus and Ben Sirach and ask ourselves: What am I saying each day with my 25 – 30, 000 words and what are my words saying about me? What am I disclosing when I speak? What is revealed of my heart's abundance when I open my mouth?

The principle is that our words and works reflect accurately the condition of our spiritual heart in the same way that an X-ray or an MRI reflects the condition of our physical heart. Our words and works make it clear what are in our spiritual heart.

The person who fails to tell the truth or who uses words that confuse with political jargon, trying to convince himself for his actions, really doesn't have a communication problem. He/she has a heart problem.

What do your words reveal about your heart? What about when you explode in anger, nitpicking, speck pointing i.e., “What a lovely outfit. Boy, if you’d lose a few more pounds it would fit even better.” Or “Congratulations on your promotion, too bad it took you so long to there.” That is a heart that is insecure with low self-esteem

Yes, our words often reveal the state of our hearts. When our words take life instead of give life to the other, it affects us, as well as it affects our hearts and to those to whom we speak. Give life with our words and we have life, take life, and we lose life.

We can wake each morning with an attitude of “Good God, it’s morning!” or “Good morning God!” The choice is ours. Kids speaks from the heart, as nothing obscures it: A mother, seeing her son picking his nose said, “No, would you like a tissue?” He responds, “No thanks mom, I have my fingers.”

Our actions are an outward expression of our inward being. It is “out of the good treasure of the heart” that the good person produces good and “out of evil treasure of his heart” that the evil person produces evil.

Abstaining from voting to assist babies born alive after an abortion to die is a heart who has lost conscience. To take children from parent immigrants is a heartless heart.

*Richard S. Halverson, the former U.S. Senate Chaplain, used to challenge people with the following image:

You're going to meet an old man [or woman] someday down the road—ten, thirty, fifty years from now—waiting there for you. You'll be catching up with him [or her]. What kind of old man are you going to meet?

He may be a seasoned, soft, gracious fellow—a gentleman who has grown old gracefully, surrounded by hosts of friends, friends who call him blessed because of what his life has meant to them.

Or he may be a bitter, disillusioned, dried-up old buzzard without a good word for anyone—soured, friendless, and alone. That old man will be you. He'll be the composite of everything you do, say, and think—today and tomorrow.

His mind will he see in a mold you have made by your beliefs. His heart will be turning out what you've been putting into it. Every little thought, every deed goes into this old man.

Every day in every way you are becoming more and more like yourself. Amazing but true. You're beginning to look more like yourself, think more like yourself, and talk more like yourself.

You're becoming yourself more and more. Live only in terms of what you're getting out of life and the old man gets smaller drier harder crabbier more self-centered. Open your life to others, think in terms of what you can give, your contribution to life, and the old man grows larger, softer, kindlier, and greater.

That is the old man I hope to meet at the end of life's journey.