

33rd Sunday Ordinary Time Year "C" *Mind your own business..*
Malachi 3:19-20; 2 Thess. 3:7-12; Luke 21:5-19
November 12-13, 2016/ 5:15p, 12:00 p.m., 5:00 p.m.

“Mind your own business.” “It is impolite to stare.” “Say ‘Thank you.’” The list was unending, its purpose clear. From an early age, we children we taught the importance of manners. Some items needed little explanation. Gossip was certainly among them. “Mind your own beeswax,” a variant, dates to our colonial days when people sat around the fireplace, making beeswax candles and one supposes, sharing gossip! It existed long before St. Paul’s day.

Dictionaries define gossip as “idle talk or rumor, especially about the personal or private affairs of others.” The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* never mentions the word gossip, but it does have a lot to say about speaking the truth.¹ It speaks of:

- Rash Judgment—assuming as true the faults of others, without sufficient foundation.
- Detraction—disclosing the faults of another without a valid reason, to persons who did not know them
- Calumny—making harmful remarks about others that are contrary to the truth, causing others to make false judgments

Just because something is true, we do not have the right to share that information. Celebrity gossip websites have grown to a multi-million dollar industry. One site receives 80 million hits a month worldwide, and now extends far beyond Hollywood. But its worldly “success” begs the fundamental question—why do people have an insatiable appetite for all the sordid details about the lives of others? Are we bored? Are we insecure, delighting in the faults of others so that we feel one to reveal the latest news? I suspect all of these and more. Sadly, it happens in the Church just as it happens within families, and frankly we priests are the worst offenders!

¹ Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph # 2477

We must be willing to question our motives. Does this person truly need to know? Normally gossip is about trivial matters and only venially sinful. Items that are common knowledge may not constitute gossip at all, but again, we must ask why we are spreading negative things, even if true. Gossip is more serious sin than most people think. Gossip can indeed constitute grave matter, especially if it includes spreading false ideas about another. If our gossip leads to the destruction of a person's reputation- it is gravely sinful.

So, what can we do? For starters, make it clear to others that you will not participate in gossip, and that you don't want to listen to it. Your non-verbal communication sends a very strong message, but it comes with risks. Gossip is an unhealthy way of bonding friendships and groups. Be courageous and stand your ground. Don't be a willing participant.

If for whatever reason you cannot detach yourself from a gossip at that exact moment, make a point of trying to defend the person they are gossiping about by throwing in a question or comment that turns the gossip on its head, takes the wind right out of its sail. Gossipers need supportive listeners and are unlikely to continue if their gossip and point of view is being challenged.

Human nature does not change. Saint Paul attacked the problem in his day, just as we must in our own. The rise of the internet and Twitter have made a bad trait of fallen human nature even more insidious. "Everyone should observe an appropriate reserve concerning persons' private lives."² We must all conform our lives to the Gospel precept of fraternal love, and when necessary confess our sins, including the serious sins associated with damaging another's name and reputation. "Mind your own business." Sometimes the earliest advice we received turned out to be the best.

² Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph # 2492