

“Mind your own business.” “It is impolite to stare.” “Always be sure to say ‘Thank you.’” The list was unending, its purpose clear. From an early age, we children were taught the importance of manners. Some directives needed little explanation. Gossip was certainly among them. St. Paul calls out this behavior in our second reading, noting that “some are conducting themselves among you in a disorderly way, by not keeping busy but minding the business of others.”

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 has much to say about speaking the truth. It speaks of:

- Rash Judgment- even tacitly assuming as true, without sufficient foundation, the moral fault of another.
- Detraction- disclosing the faults or failings of another without an objectively 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.¹

Just because something is true, this does not give us the right to share that information. TMZ, a celebrity gossip service, has grown to an industry with annual revenues north of \$125 million. The site receives 100 million+ hits per month and extends far beyond Hollywood. But its worldly “success” begs the fundamental question-why do we have an insatiable appetite for the sordid details about the lives of others?

Are we bored or insecure about ourselves? Do we feel more important if we can be the 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. But we must ask ourselves some key question with respect to our motives. Does this person truly need to know? Typically, gossip concerns trivial matters and is venially sinful. Items that are common knowledge may not

¹ See the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph # 2477

constitute gossip at all, but again, we must ask why we are spreading negative things, even if true.

Gossip is a more serious sin than most people think. Gossip constitutes grave matter if it includes spreading false ideas about another. If our gossip destroys a person's reputation, it would surely be a mortal sin. What can we do? Above all, we should be careful to interpret insofar as possible another's thoughts, words, and deeds in a favorable way.

Make it evident to others that you will neither actively participate in nor listen to any gossip. Our non-verbal communication sends a very strong message, though it comes with risks. Gossip is an unhealthy way of bonding friendships and groups. Be courageous and stand your ground.

If you cannot easily detach yourself from gossip in the moment, taking the wind right out of its sail by offering a supportive word about the person. I read that the air we breathe contains 21% oxygen; most fires need at least 16% to burn. Just as fire needs oxygen for its sustenance, gossipers need supportive listeners and are unlikely to continue if their viewpoint is actively being challenged.

Human nature does not change. Saint Paul attacked the problem in his day, just as we must in our own. "Everyone should observe an appropriate reserve concerning persons' private lives."² We must all conform our lives to the Gospel precept of fraternal love.

When necessary, we 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 actually turned out to be the best advice of all.

² Catechism of the Catholic Church, paragraph # 2492.