

## V Sunday after Pentecost - Reconciliation

*In the name of the Father...*

Today's epistle and gospel are most appropriate on this occasion of a new pastor taking up the care of the flock.

Writing: *do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling*,<sup>1</sup> St Peter reminds us of the necessity of the spiritual work of mercy of bearing wrongs patiently - especially injurious words.

St Thomas Aquinas enumerates distinct verbal injuries of reviling, backbiting, tale-bearing, and derision. He writes: *Sins of word should be weighed chiefly by the speaker's intention, wherefore these sins are differentiated according to the various intentions of those who speak against another. Now just as the reviler intends to injure the honor of the person he reviles, the backbiter to depreciate a good name, and the tale-bearer to destroy friendship, so too the derider intends to shame the person he derides.*<sup>2</sup>

Thomas writes of reviling that by it: *a man's faults are exposed to the detriment of his honor.* That is, with the intention of dishonoring someone who is present, reviling publicly exposes another's fault. Considering the origin of reviling, Thomas quotes St Isidore of Seville: *a reviler is hasty and bursts out in injurious words*, as also Pope St Gregory the Great that *anger gives rise to revilings*. Thomas continues: *While one sin may arise from various causes, it is nevertheless said to have its source chiefly in that one from which it is wont to arise most frequently, through being closely connected with its end. Now reviling is closely connected with anger's end, which is revenge: since the easiest way for the angry man to take revenge on another is to revile him. Therefore, reviling arises chiefly from anger.*<sup>3</sup> Thus it is in a fit of anger that a reviler reveals the faults of another in order to publicly dishonor him as an act of revenge.

Of the other sins of the tongue mentioned, backbiting differs from reviling by being done in secret, that is, not face-to-face. Thomas observes: *Just as one man injures another by deed in two ways - openly, as by robbery or by doing him any kind of violence - and secretly, as by theft, or by a crafty blow, so again one man injures another by words in two ways - in one way, openly, and this is done by reviling him - and in another way secretly, and this is done by backbiting.*<sup>4</sup> Thomas continues: *Backbiting differs from reviling... as to the end in view, i.e. as regards the injury inflicted, the reviler*

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<sup>1</sup> [1 Pet 3:9](#)

<sup>2</sup> [ST IIa IIae 75, 1, c](#)

<sup>3</sup> [ST IIa IIae, 72, 4, c](#)

<sup>4</sup> [ST IIa IIae 73, 1, c](#)

*injuring a man's honor; the backbiter injuring his good name.* Reviling damages the honor of someone present; backbiting damages the good name of someone secretly so that he cannot defend himself.

Tale-bearing is distinct again. Quoting a gloss: *Tale-bearers sow discord among friends; backbiters deny or disparage others' good points,*<sup>5</sup> Thomas writes: *The tale-bearer and the backbiter agree in matter, and also in form or mode of speaking, since they both speak evil secretly of their neighbor... They differ however in end, because the backbiter intends to blacken his neighbor's good name, wherefore he brings forward those evils especially about his neighbor which are likely to ... depreciate his good name: whereas a tale-bearer intends to sever friendship.*<sup>6</sup> The backbiter and tale-bearer both work in secret, one to damage someone's good name, the other to turn his friends away from him.

Finally, derision is a distinct sin again, for... *the derider intends to shame the person he derides. And since this end is distinct from the others, it follows that the sin of derision is distinct from the foregoing sins.*<sup>7</sup>

Thomas considers that all these sins can be grave matter, that is mortal sins. St Peter concurs by quoting the psalm: *Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good.*

These sins are grave because they break down social cohesion, the unity of a society. St Peter exhorted: *have unity of mind.*

St Paul wrote similarly to the Corinthians: *I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.*<sup>8</sup>

Treating of dissension or discord, Thomas writes: *Discord is opposed to concord. Now ... concord results from charity, in as much as charity directs many hearts together to one thing, which is chiefly the divine good, secondarily, the good of our neighbor. Wherefore discord is a sin in so far as it is opposed to this concord.* Thomas observes of concord: *concord, properly speaking, is between one man and another, in so far as the wills of various hearts agree together in consenting to the same thing.*<sup>9</sup> That is, concord results from charity so that a multitude is united in the first place toward God, and in the second place toward the real good of neighbor.

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<sup>5</sup> [ST IIa IIae 74, 1, sc](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Ibid., 1, c](#)

<sup>7</sup> [ST IIa IIae 75, 1, c](#)

<sup>8</sup> [1 Cor 1:10](#)

<sup>9</sup> [ST IIa IIae 29, 1, c](#)

Thomas observes that dissension can arise directly or accidentally. He writes: *Wherefore a man directly disaccords with his neighbor, when he knowingly and intentionally dissents from the divine good and his neighbor's good, to which he ought to consent. Discord arises accidentally however... when one deems a certain thing good and another thinks contrariwise... Such like discord is neither sinful nor against charity, unless it be accompanied by... undue obstinacy.* That is, two people genuinely can differ about what is good, with resulting accidental discord: but if they are obstinate in their differences and affect the common good, particularly the unity and peace of some society – the supreme intrinsic good of a society - then that accidental discord can become mortally sinful. Thus, St Paul enumerated dissension or discord among the works of the flesh, opposed to the works of the spirit: *Now the works of the flesh are plain: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*<sup>10</sup>

Our Lord highlighted the danger of disaccord to the true worship of God in today's gospel: *So, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go, first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.* We can note that this reconciliation must be genuine and not merely superficial. Our Lord warned: *unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.* The so-called righteous of the Pharisees was to restrain themselves in the external forum. But this is not enough for Our Lord: *You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.'* *But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment,* that anger which is the source of reviling and which is most damaging to social cohesion.

Given the universality of Original Sin, in any community - and church communities are no different, and this one is no different - there always are elements of *strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, factions.* There always is a legacy of *reviling, backbiting, tale-bearing, derision.* Let us take this opportunity to reflect on Our Lord's words: *But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire.*

As St Francis of Assisi church here in Lincoln NE begins a new phase of its life, now would be a good time to consign any such legacy to the past, to heed Our Lord's admonition: *[I]f you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave*

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<sup>10</sup> [Gal 5:19-21](#)

*your gift there before the altar and go, first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. Now would be a good time to heed St Peter's exhortation: do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling... all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart and a humble mind.*

*In the name of the Father...*