

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. I am dating myself a bit with this saying I will share, but, considering our second reading from Ephesians it bears repeating and discussing. "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me." While that may have been a good defense mechanism when I was a small child, based on my experience since then and maybe yours too, nothing could be further from the truth! Names certainly hurt us, especially those uttered in malice, anger, or hatred. Verse 29 from Ephesians is quite clear about what the language of Christians should be like.

St. Paul wrote, "Let no evil talk come from your mouths, but only what is useful for building up." The surrounding culture in which we live has embraced evil talk with a vengeance! The agenda of many in this culture is to decimate and annihilate everyone who disagrees with a person speaking his/her opinion. This intent of language has crept into the church, and seeks to divide the Body of Christ. Jesus, himself warned us about hurtful language in the Sermon on the Mount as well. His point is very clear; it will not be tolerated. That means we all need to be very mindful, even if others choose to ignore our Lord in this matter. Our words are to build up the Body of Christ, for we are members of one another. The purpose of our words is to build up and give grace to those who hear what we say.

When our words are not life-giving and up building of one another and our neighbor, we grieve the Holy Spirit. We make the Spirit sad and disappointed. For He has sealed us, connected us to the life of God the Father and Jesus the Son, and to one another in the Body of Christ. Our words, everyone of them has an impact on those who with us belong to God in Christ. There is freedom we receive in Christ always, but this freedom is given to us, to live, act, and speak the way Jesus with the Spirit has taught us and continues to teach us. As Paul wrote, "Put away from you all bitterness, wrath, arguing/wrangling and slander together with all malice, and be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you."

The freedom we have in Christ is never a license to do whatever we want! It is a license for us to live for and to love God, one another in the Body of Christ and our neighbor near and far. Our freedom has cost Jesus his life! He alone made the ultimate sacrifice for each and every human being that ever was or ever will be, so that through him all may have a relationship with God. A relationship that is everlasting, eternal, and unstoppable! This is an incredible sacrifice for a terribly underserving human race. We always focus on our desires, wants, comfort and the desire to be in control of our own lives and some even want to control the lives of others. In Romans chapter 5, St. Paul wrote, "God proves his love for us, because while we were still sinners Christ died for us, making the ultimate sacrifice for you, for me, for every last human being ever!"

Jesus deserves better than that from us, doesn't he? We know his word: we read it, right? We may even study it from time to time, but how do we live it? Do people hear from us bitterness, wrangling, slander, mixed up with malice, coming from our mouths, the likes of which we hear from the surrounding culture who do not follow him. This is a serious matter, because Paul tells us to "be imitators of God – as God's beloved children, to live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice to God."

Paul isn't expecting us to be sinless; he knows that is not possible. However, he is calling us to live as God's children, for whom Christ died. To live in the love, we know we have received from Jesus and his forgiveness. We can't yet do this every day 24/7, however, we are baptized and sealed with the Holy Spirit, making us a new creation, by God's love and grace through Jesus' death and resurrection. Martin Luther once wrote, "This life isn't righteousness, but growth in righteousness." He said that because in baptism we have put on Christ and received his righteousness. So, we are called to grow in his righteousness. Learning always to be imitators of God as beloved children.

To help us to live in Christ's righteousness and to be imitators of God, we are welcomed to the table of grace, to our Lord's Supper, to be fed and strengthened for our journey through this very difficult world. For our Lord who is the bread of life – has come down from heaven, to bring us close to God again through the loving sacrifice of his own life, so that all of us may have new life and eternal life with God. In this meal of bread and wine, we are fed the body and blood of Jesus our Savior and Lord. In love and mercy Jesus gave his flesh for our life and the life of the world, as he died on the cross and rose from the dead. We are blessed because the Father has drawn us to Jesus. Let us come and eat the bread of life, his body and drink the wine his blood- believing and knowing we are forgiven and have life in him right now- reconciled life. For by God's grace and great mercy through Christ Jesus, we are beloved children of God. We are nourished here and sent out to witness to our Lord speaking words of kindness, up building words, words of grace for all. For these are Jesus' words. Let us also invite others to come to Jesus, so that they too may taste and see that our Lord is good. And that his love and mercy endures forever. + Amen.