

19. February 2022

## **“The three day rule”**

**Jas 3:1-10**

*Only a few of you, my brothers, should be teachers, bearing in mind that we shall receive a stricter judgement. For we all trip up in many ways. Someone who does not trip up in speech has reached perfection and is able to keep the whole body on a tight rein. Once we put a bit in the horse's mouth, to make it do what we want, we have the whole animal under our control. Or think of ships: no matter how big they are, even if a gale is driving them, they are directed by a tiny rudder wherever the whim of the helmsman decides. So the tongue is only a tiny part of the body, but its boasts are great. Think how small a flame can set fire to a huge forest; the tongue is a flame too. Among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a whole wicked world: it infects the whole body; catching fire itself from hell, it sets fire to the whole wheel of creation. Wild animals and birds, reptiles and fish of every kind can all be tamed, and have been tamed, by humans; but nobody can tame the tongue - it is a pest that will not keep still, full of deadly poison. We use it to bless the Lord and Father, but we also use it to curse people who are made in God's image: the blessing and curse come out of the same mouth. My brothers, this must be wrong.*

The Apostle makes it clear how much we can fail with our words. They can be a deadly poison. Let us remember how our Lord was mocked (Mt 27:29)... How ugly is mockery and despising; how reprehensible is frivolous and hurtful language!

Adolf Hitler's rise to power, which made him dictator of Germany, was due in large part to propaganda, trumpeted by his "tongue", the minister Joseph Goebbels, to drive people into a kind of frenzy, in whose intoxication they were ready to follow a man who, among other crimes, was guilty of the Holocaust of the Jewish People. A tongue full of venom and evil, fired by hell?

We will find many examples that confirm the truthfulness of the words of the Apostle James.

However, we should also look at ourselves, to follow the last piece of advice offered by this reading, after making it clear that *"the blessing and curse come out of the same mouth. My brothers, this must be wrong."*

Therefore, our words must be imbued with love and truth. No evil words should proceed from our lips; but those that edify, comfort and strengthen.

But in addition to closing our lips to all negative words, we must also increasingly avoid useless words, which "kill the spirit".

So what can we do?

The most important thing to restrain our tongue is the purification of the heart, because from that heart come evil thoughts and all the other things that Jesus makes us see (Mt 15:19). With a purified heart, it will be much easier for words to come from our lips that bring blessing to others (Lk 6:45).

But there is a long way to go to reach purity of heart. Words still slip out of our mouths that would be better left unsaid. Maybe we notice it later, but then it is often too late. We are unable to keep quiet and are easily inflamed. Instead of reflecting first, praying and choosing our words carefully, we get carried away and end up speaking thoughtlessly.

The following advice might help us to deal with our tongue: I will call it the "three-day rule". This advice is especially useful when it comes to issues that affect us a lot, when we are under attack, when we receive difficult news, when crisis situations arise or also when we notice that it is not convenient to react spontaneously. Of course, the "three-day rule" can only be applied in situations that do not require an immediate response from us.

Let's assume, then, that we find ourselves in a conflict situation....

Generally, on the first day we will have to deal a lot with the emotions that are aroused in us when certain issues are touched upon. These emotions we have to process in prayer, before the Lord. This means surrendering to Him over and over again any negative feelings, such as anger or any other feelings that stir up in our hearts. At this stage, we should not yet be thinking about what and how to respond.

On the second day, when we are no longer so caught up in our first emotional reaction, we begin to reflect on what has happened to us. Generally, we are now better able to see the situation more objectively. We no longer remain in a purely defensive position, and we will also be able to better understand the situation of the

other person in question. Again, prayer should accompany us throughout the second day, also for the one or ones with whom the conflict arose.

On the third day, when our hearts have become more calm, we will ask the Holy Spirit what is the best way to respond and what is most helpful in the given situation.