

The Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

Now we have the sum and general understanding of this commandment: Let no one do any harm to his neighbor with the tongue, whether friend or foe. Do not speak evil of him, no matter whether it is true or false, unless it is done by commandment or for his reformation. Let everyone use his tongue and make it serve for the best of everyone else, to cover up his neighbor's sins and infirmities [1 Peter 4:8], excuse them, conceal and garnish them with his own reputation. 286 The chief reason for this should be the one that Christ declares in the Gospel, where He includes all commandments about our neighbor, "whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them" [Matthew 7:12].

Even nature teaches the same thing in our own bodies, as St. Paul says, "On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty" (1 Corinthians 12:22–23). No one covers his face, eyes, nose, and mouth, for they, being in themselves the most honorable parts that we have, do not require it. But the most weak parts, of which we are ashamed, we cover with all diligence. Hands, eyes, and the whole body must help to cover and conceal them. So also among ourselves should we clothe whatever blemishes and infirmities we find in our neighbor and serve and help him to promote his honor to the best of our ability. On the other hand, we should prevent whatever may be disgraceful to him. It is especially an excellent and noble virtue for someone always to explain things for his neighbor's advantage and to put the best construction on all he may hear about his neighbor (if it is not notoriously evil). Or, at any rate, forgive the matter over and against the poisonous tongues that are busy wherever they can to pry out and discover something to blame in a neighbor [Psalm 140:3]. They explain and pervert the matter in the worst way, as is done now especially with God's precious Word and its preachers.

There are included, therefore, in this commandment quite a multitude of good works. These please God most highly and bring abundant good and blessing, if only the blind world and the false saints would recognize them. For there is nothing on or in a person that can do both greater and more extensive good or harm in spiritual and in temporal matters than the tongue. This is true even though it is the least and weakest part of a person [James 3:5].

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