

People's words reveal plenty

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 6:39-45; (R1) Sirach 27:4-7; (R2) 1 Corinthians 15:54-58.

The first reading and the Gospel state that you can learn a lot about a man by what he says. "A man's speech does disclose the bent of his mind" (R1). "Each man speaks from his heart's abundance" (R3).

Sirach's message is that speech shows what a man is like — he may be a sieve, a piece of pottery or the fruit of a tree. Our Lord said the same: talk is a "read-out" of what's inside us — to use computer jargon. He warns His disciples against being either hypocritical or hypercritical.

Hypocritical means literally "play-acting" — pretending to be what one is not or to say what one does not mean. One day the Pharisees laid a booby-trap in the path of Jesus. To throw Him off guard, they said, "We know you are truthful and don't care about people's opinions." Then they posed the cleverly crafted question: "Tell us is it law-

ful to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" Jesus took care of the trap easily with His render-unto-Caesar answer, so that even the Pharisees left him and went away (Mt. 22:15-22).

When people are honest and straightforward, they will never get entangled in their speech. The old saying is, "You can't cheat an honest man." Nor for that matter a sincere man.

The word "sincere" comes from two Latin words: *sine* meaning "without" and *cera* meaning "wax." Buildings were made of marble in ancient Rome. Sometimes a block of marble would get chipped during transport. Yet a dishonest builder would not discard the damaged block. Instead, he would fill in the break with wax.

Only later, after the building was constructed, would the deception be discovered by the discoloration of the wax. As a result, it became necessary to include in building contracts a clause that the work be done *sine cera* — "without wax."

The word "sincere" then came to mean a person who was honest through and through; one in whom

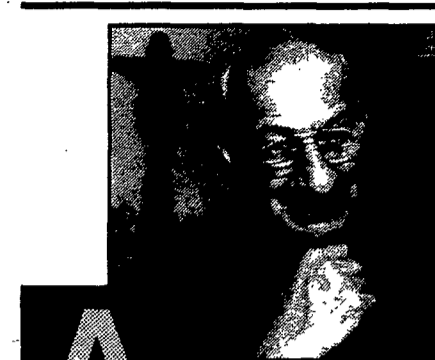
there was no deception or duplicity. One who is consistent, who does not say one thing and mean another. Jesus wanted His followers to be that kind of a person.

Closely related to hypocrisy is hypercriticism — one who is judgmental and looks down on others. Jesus said, "Why look at the speck in your brother's eye and miss the plank in your own?"

A Japanese banker once stated that "before the war they had a slogan in business that business talk is like a folding screen. You have to make it crooked to make it stand. If you make it straight it won't stand."

Thus Jesus said, "Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No.' Communication that is straight to the point is always best. A college student desperate for money wrote home to Dad, "No mon ... no fun ... your Son!" Dad wrote back: "Too bad ... I'm sad ... your Dad!"

Speech is the bridge God has given us to build up community. Hypocrisy, hypercriticism, lies and dishonesty rot the bridges and make social life impossible. Thus it was



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

once said, "You can't do business with Hitler, nor with Joseph Stalin." Both men believed the Marxist declaration that the lie was their best weapon.

It is the weapon of the Father of Lies. It must never be ours. "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who are truthful are his delight." (Proverbs 12:22).

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