

## **Gossiping**

### **By Bishop George Khodr**

When you do not want to confront yourself, that is face the reality of your existence, your tongue becomes a sword with which you kill the others in you since you are unable to eradicate your sins or you probably do not see them so that you will not be frightened by them and thus you remain closed in your own pettiness. When the foreign policy of a country becomes dominated by a high rate of gossiping slandering another country, that is a sign of emptiness in those who are gossiping in the slandering country; and such emptiness is self-inflation. Thus the “other” is the one you bruise or kill since you see yourself as without bruises and wounds and you do not see yourself as the one who is wounded and bruised and that you are about to be destroyed. And you cannot admit your weakness since such a confession is a detection of sin and such detection is the beginning of healing or all of it. And that is the conviction that the “other” is your physician; or that your “health” is a product of his (the “other”) examining you and counseling you.

Gossiping is a “closing in” on one’s self; it is a closing in on emptiness. You cannot tolerate emptiness so you fly away from it and you destroy the “other” not aware that by doing that you destroy yourself. You “destroy yourself” when you feel threatened by discovering your real self when loved by the “other”; and you “love yourself” if you desire to make it better by sharing in the love the “others” have for you. You exist only when you love and when you are loved by those who love the Lord. Perhaps God’s only aim for His creation is this journey of love in Him. Only in that would God be “seen”, as such it (God’s love) is a seeking after the Word (Jesus) who has been since the Beginning.

But if you close on yourself, then it is inevitable not to have inner discourse coming from evil and corruption; as such you get seduced by your passions and I mean here the roots of sin in you. These are the “uncleanness” the nature of which you know, or maybe you do not know but you need to root it out from your heart since it results in harming you even though you have not deliberately desired it. Yet uncleanness has to leave you so that you can dwell in the “other” if that “other” does not stay away from you due to his purity. As such the arrow (of gossiping) does not hit its target but it harms the one who sent it (that is you).

The philosophers of Ethics distinguish between slander and gossip. In the Quran, I only find the word slander; and its meaning is to “invent lies” as it comes in Surah 5: 103 and in Sura 16: 116 “ Do not say about what your lying tongues describe: ‘THIS IS LAWFUL AND THIS IS UNLAWFUL,’ inventing lies against Allah. Those who invent lies against Allah are not successful”.

Lying is a form of fear in the one who lies and a slander of the “other” whom it targets. That is what slander is. But you might say true things about the “other” either because you are a gossip or because you want to hurt him. For instance you might say “that person steals” and then you mention an episode of that. That is what is called gossip while slander is when you invent lies.

Disclosing the weak points of people does them great harm since this exposes them to be shredded by those who have an interest in that; and such gossip coming from you, might stay with them as long as they live. This is true especially in women, when you make their chastity a matter of libel. People give ear to that quickly without making sure of things. And maybe the gossip might move from one mouth to another and as such might destroy families; you are called to be reticent concerning the sins of others and such silence helps you out of slandering others. Silence is an excellent watch over one’s soul since it allows one to be quiet with the Lord and as such be repentant. But he who gossips does not know what repentance is.

You might be exposed to gossip in social activities. What you hear then is something to be thrown in the “well of your reticence” and you do not give yourself room to reflect on what you heard of the iniquity of others for fear you would plunge into them. The Fathers have warned us not to reflect on our past sins after we have repented so that those sins would not tempt us again. You have to reflect on the virtues and their beauty; perhaps they will draw you closer to them; do not reflect on what is rotten so that you do not think of committing them.

Read this in James 3: 5-13, “Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.” If the apostle recognizes the difficulty in having a “chaste” tongue and despite that asks of us to have our tongues be “chaste”, that means that it is possible to have that if we seek it from God.

God wants from you only what is pure; if your purity is strong in you, you become a fountain of purity for others. Each one of us wants to be loved. That is why the “other” would be sad when you slander him. He also would be sad if you tell others what he has confided in you. Make it a principle to consider what one tells you as something he does not want to say to someone other than you, or maybe he does not dare to. Consider all what you hear as “confidential” as the

Christians say. But if you realize that spreading some information you got would be of benefit to others and would strengthen them in the truth, then go ahead and spread it, keeping in mind not to disclose information that you are entrusted with by someone who does not wish to have it disclosed.

“The conversations in company are in trusteeship” is a rule of conduct in our society. That means that all what you hear when you are with people should remain there and not go out. This is why reticence is better and of more benefit in most cases. Not all what you get to know should be spread around. Most information is in the custody of those to whom it belongs and of those who have been entrusted with it. So abide by that thus guarding your own purity and the integrity of others and their reputation.

Each person has matters that he keeps to himself; and friendship might permit that he would disclose them (to the friend) if he is able to make sure that what he says is not only unharmed but is of benefit. Fortify yourself with reticence for that would give you eloquence in your silence. Reticence is not always in need of your words in order to transmit the good that you store. Humanity is a communion of love, and love needs witnesses whose lives are according to the commandments of the Lord; and they themselves give life to others with their compassion, kindness and serviceability. For through those the Lord has brought about his compassion.