

Take-Home for Session 4: The Tongue, the Spark, and the Sins We Hold

If You Come Forward to Serve: An Inductive Study of Sirach

What We Found

- The double-tongued person, saying different things to different audiences, ends in disgrace because trust cannot fasten to a person with no fixed weight (5:9-6:1).
- Ben Sira's ethic of hearing: bury reports rather than broadcast them, presume innocence, and go directly to the person (19:6-17); Jesus likewise commands direct, private correction when a brother sins against you (Matthew 18:15).
- The discovery: the Our Father teaches the very principle of Sirach 28:2, and Jesus underlines that petition alone (Matthew 6:12, 14-15), and dramatizes it in the unforgiving servant, whose forgiven debt dwarfs the one he refuses to release.
- A spark glows when you blow on it (28:12), and James says the tongue sets whole forests ablaze (James 3:5-6): so build a door and a bolt for your mouth and make scales for your words (28:24-26). Forgiveness is a grace-empowered decision of the will, not a feeling, and deep wounds may need time and help.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Augustine of Hippo

Augustine had a warning carved into his dining table: whoever loves to gnaw at the life of the absent should know this table is closed to him. His biographer St. Possidius records that he enforced the rule even on visiting bishops. For the Doctor of Grace, the reputation of the absent was sacred ground, guarded at the very place where talk flows easiest.

St. Possidius, Life of St. Augustine, 22 (paraphrased)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Philip Neri

A story handed down about the Apostle of Rome tells of a penitent given an unusual penance for gossip: pluck a chicken while walking through town, then go back and collect every feather. The scattered feathers, impossible to regather, were the point. Whether or not every detail is historical, the Church has retold it for centuries because it is exactly true to life.

Traditional story of St. Philip Neri (as handed down)

VOICE OF THE CHURCH: St. Francis de Sales

The gentle Doctor devotes chapters of the Introduction to the Devout Life to speech: never speak evil of another without true charitable necessity, he counsels, for detraction is a kind of murder committed against a neighbor's honor, and the tongue that slanders kills three souls with one blow. His remedy is deliberate, habitual kindness of speech.

Introduction to the Devout Life, Part III, ch. 29 (paraphrased)

Live It This Week

- Pray the Our Father slowly once a day, pausing at forgive us our trespasses as we forgive, and name the person silently in the pause.
- Fast completely this week from one specific speech habit you identified (a chat thread, a topic, a person you talk about). Notice what the silence surfaces.
- If you heard a damaging report about someone recently, apply 19:13-17: go to the person kindly, or bury it for good. And if it involves abuse, crime, or danger to anyone, take it promptly to the appropriate authorities instead (19:8).

Scripture Memory Verse

"Forgive your neighbor the wrong he has done, and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray." (**Sirach 28:2**)

Before Next Session

Read Sirach 6:5-17. Make a private list of your three closest friends and hold it next to the passage.

Catechism References

CCC 2477-2479; CCC 2838-2845