

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**Malicious Talk** Saturday after Ash Wednesday March 8, 2014 8:15 AM **Is 58:9b-14;**  
Lk 5:27-32 (St. John of God, religious) (Negative news about other people is not edifying. “Say only those things people need to hear.”)

**“If you remove from your midst oppression, false accusation and malicious speech.”**

This is from the scroll of Isaiah, and he is talking about **something that really does harm community life: careless talk, negative talk, unsubstantiated rumors spreading around about people, especially people in the community.** “I heard this.” Well, this may or may not be true, but how are you really helping anybody by telling somebody else what you heard? **Negative news about other people is not edifying.** St. Paul makes it very clear: **“Say only those things people need to hear.”** That excludes all bad news, especially about other people. Whether or not it is true is a secondary consideration. It’s much worse of course, **much worse, to deliberately spread false stories.** But **even spreading true ones is wrong.** That’s something I don’t think people really understand; it’s very clear in both Isaiah and St. Paul. Even true stories that are negative, bad, that somehow bring down another person’s reputation should never be spread. Now **this is different from reporting to authorities some crime.** But negative stories about people, what goes on in their personal lives, has nothing to do with other people. And not only that, it doesn’t help edify the faith and practice of the community, and therefore it is wrong in principle to spread it.

Now for some reason, I have never figured out why this is, for some reason **people seem to think that what they hear, if a story is going around, it must be true. Where does that come from?** I’ll tell you where it comes from: **the Evil One,** the father of lies.

In fact, it’s a very interesting study to look at the **different titles for the devil.** The “devil” means the “one who divides,” the one who divides: families, parishes, communities, societies—**divides. That’s the goal.** That’s the first thing. Don’t forget **“Satan” means the**

**“adversary.”** Do you have an adversary in life? You certainly do, a very intelligent, resourceful, even brilliant adversary—yes, you do. You better know that. The third word: **father of lies**—that was Jesus’ more favorite term, if you want to say that, the father of lies. **Every temptation is a kind of lie.** So another way of saying “father of lies” is **“tempter.”** But another word is found quite often in, especially the Old Testament, but also New, the **“accuser.”** The accuser is cast out. That’s Christ’s role. That’s his ministry to cast out the accuser. But **the accuser, although cast out, is still at work, especially among the unconscious, clueless Christian people, who don’t think about what they say.** They carry on the work of the accuser. They carry on the work of the father of lies by spreading false stories, or if not false, nonetheless, evil. False and evil go together. **True evil stories and false stories are all evil,** one because it’s about something that is bad in itself and the other is because it’s false and therefore bad.

**There can be no growth toward holiness or toward spiritual growth or toward any kind of saintliness if we don’t look at this topic. How do I talk? What do I pass on?** If we want to follow this, a lot of things are supposed to enter our ears and stay there.