Heard any gossip lately?

“There is no such thing as innocent gossip.” — Pope Francis
“Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?” Luke 6:41

It has frequently been said that guys like to talk about things and girls like to talk about people. Come upon a gathering of men of any age and they will be talking about sports, cars, projects at home or work, and more sports. Get a group of women or teenage girls together and you can typically catch up on the latest news about everyone they know.

The Oxford Dictionary defines gossip as: “casual or unconstrained conversation or reports about other people, typically involving details that are not confirmed as being true.”

Just this past Friday Pope Francis spoke about gossip and warned against “the evil of gossip and speaking ill against one’s neighbor” during his homily at morning Mass at the Domus Sanctae Marthae. The morning Gospel was from St. Luke 6: 39-42:

Jesus told his disciples a parable:
“Can a blind person guide a blind person?
Will not both fall into a pit?
No disciple is superior to the teacher;
but when fully trained,
every disciple will be like his teacher.
Why do you notice the splinter in your brother’s eye,
but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own?
How can you say to your brother,
‘Brother, let me remove that splinter in your eye,’
when you do not even notice the wooden beam in your own eye?
You hypocrite! Remove the wooden beam from your eye first;
then you will see clearly to remove the splinter in your brother’s eye.”

Pope Francis made some important points about gossip:

- The person who speaks ill of his neighbor is a hypocrite: “Those who live judging their neighbor, speaking ill of their neighbor, are hypocrites, because they lack the strength and the courage to look to their own

shortcomings."

- We must never be judges of others: Every time we judge our brothers in our hearts – or worse still when we speak ill of them with others, we are "Christian murderers." Pope Francis: "A Christian murderer…. It's not me saying this, it's the Lord. And there is no place for nuances. If you speak ill of your brother, you kill your brother. And every time we do this, we are imitating that gesture of Caine, the first murderer in history."

- Quoting St. James the Apostle, the Holy Father said that the tongue is to be used to praise God.

- No one deserves to be the victim of gossip. Pope Francis exhorts us to "Go and pray for him! Go and do penance for her!"

- In this time in history when there is talk of war and urgent pleas for peace, the Holy Father said that "a gesture of conversion on our own behalf is necessary."

- Pope Francis concluded: "We ask for grace so that we and the entire Church may convert from the crime of gossip to love, to humility, to meekness, to docility, to the generosity of love towards our neighbor."

Read the full text of his homily here from Vatican Radio.

Practical Advice:

How can we take the challenge of the Holy Father to heart and only speak with charity about others? How can we judge if what we are to say about others is appropriate or if it should be left unsaid?

I follow "People for Others," the blog of Paul Brian Campbell, S.J. of Loyola Press. Father Paul often shares "wisdom stories" and his post last October was spot on in addressing the practical issue of how to speak about others.

Wisdom Story 125: The Triple Filter Test:

In ancient Greece, Socrates was reputed to hold knowledge in high esteem. One day an acquaintance met the great philosopher and said, "Do you know what I just heard about your friend?"

"Hold on a minute," Socrates replied. "Before you talk to me about my friend, it

might be good idea to take a moment and filter what you're going to say. That's why I call it the triple filter test. The first filter is Truth. Have you made absolutely sure that what you are about to tell me is true?"

"Well, no," the man said, "actually I just heard about it and…"

"All right," said Socrates. "So you don't really know if it's true or not. Now, let's try the second filter, the filter of Goodness. Is what you are about to tell me about my friend something good?"

"Umm, no, on the contrary…"

"So," Socrates continued, "you want to tell me something bad about my friend, but you're not certain it's true. You may still pass the test though, because there's one filter left—the filter of Usefulness. Is what you want to tell me about my friend going to be useful to me?"

"No, not really."

"Well," concluded Socrates, "if what you want to tell me is neither true, nor good, nor even useful, why tell it to me at all?"

May we always use this Triple Filter Test in our conversations about others. Then we will in fact be abiding by the Catechism which states:

"The right to the communication of the truth is not unconditional. Everyone must conform his life to the Gospel precept of fraternal love. This requires us in concrete situations to judge whether or not it is appropriate to reveal the truth to someone who asks for it." —Catechism of the Catholic Church 2488