

De Sales

SPIRITUALITY CENTER

"The Power...of Words."



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Mary D. Ford

"It's not only what you say. It's how you say it."

Isn't *that* the truth!

Words are powerful.

Words can heal and raise up.

Words can injure and tear down.

The difference is how you use them.

Salesian spirituality clearly understands that words can produce communion, or alienation. Hence, some practical advice.

St. Francis de Sales challenges us: "Let your language be mild, open, sincere, frank, unaffected and honest."

Honest. Integrity, justice and fairness should be the hallmarks of your speech. But honesty is not the same as brutality. "It may not always be possible to say all that is true," observes St. Francis de Sales, "but it is never appropriate to say something against the truth.

The truth will set you free.

Open. When speaking with others in a public setting strive to be as inclusive as possible. When confidentiality is required speak to others in a confidential setting. "Never give others the occasion to believe that something evil is being spoken of them," cautions the gentleman saint.

Conversely, Francis de

Sales makes the following observation: "Lying, double-dealing, and dissimulation are always signs of a weak and mean spirit."

Whether in public or private, speak from your heart. Speak from your soul. Don't use your words to confuse, to disguise, to divide or to pitch one person against another.

Mild. "Should it be necessary to contradict anyone or oppose another's opinion, we must do it in ways that do not inflame the other's temper," says Francis de Sales. "Nothing is ever gained by harshness." Or, again: "Correction is naturally bitter, but when mixed with the sugar of loving kindness, and warmed by the fire of charity, it becomes more acceptable, gracious, even cordial."

Francis de Sales asserts that we "attract more flies with a spoonful of honey than with a barrel of vinegar."

Where you practice this gentleness is just as important as how: "When you need to correct someone, it is better to put it off a little and make the correction in private and with kindness," observes St. Jane De Chantal. In addition, do so "without nagging."

Whether in conflict or correction, keep it short – and sweet.

Unaffected. Say what you mean. Mean what you say. St. Jane de Chantal writes: "Let there be nothing in your manner of speaking or writing that smacks of affectation. In truth, I would rather have you appear unskilled than be considered affected."

The more straightforward, the better.

Sincere. Say what needs to be said in as genuine a manner as possible. St. Francis de Sales remarks: "Fidelity, plainness and sincerity of speech are assuredly a great ornament of a Christian life." For St. Jane de Chantal, you should strive for "innocent, guileless simplicity which makes one even-tempered and friendly toward everyone."

Keep things plain and simple.

So, have you recommitted yourself to being a happy, healthy and holy communicator? Above all, pray for the gift of wisdom. Wisdom? That's right! Francis de Sales writes: Wisdom consists of knowing when to and how to speak, and when and where to keep silent." Amen to that!

Remember that words are never neutral. They either strengthen – or diminish – our communion with one another.

It's up to you. Choose your words...wisely.