

*So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but shall do what pleases me, achieving the end for which I sent it. (First reading for today)*

Human speech is an amazing phenomenon – especially when it can say things like *Drink to me only with thine eyes, / And I will pledge with mine; / Or leave a kiss but in the cup, / And I'll not look for wine.* (from Ben Jonson's "Song to Celia").

On the other hand we now live in a world of cyberbullying (like "he's fat, he's a loser, she's average, she's stupid . . .") Or things much worse than that, like the tweets I sometimes read written by baseball fans that make one want to shower afterwards. Reminds me of those less "sophisticated" days when we were kids and name-calling (a childish thing) was met with our usual comeback: *Sticks and stones can break my bones but names can never hurt me.*

But burgeoning, shameless bullying at everyone's very fingertips is only a part of the modern problem. TV and radio bombard us with almost constant huckstering, three minutes of substance like news, the weather, whatever and then what seems like twenty minutes of loud voices backed by harsh "music" urgently encouraging us to buy this or that – conveying an element of haste that goes nowhere in particular. Never a second of silence; sound makes money regardless of what it says. We are talked into a hurry. As for the news, events don't move fast enough and so the *same* news is urgently proclaimed over a whole week or more before some break occurs – how many times do I have to be told that Congress is working on health care legislation or that the Giants' season will improve? Loquacity!

Speech has become loquacity which is defined as gabbiness, volubility, rambling discourse – as talkative to an extreme, as often trivial, repetitive, polarized (it takes two parties to have what is not conversation but an argument). Talk shows!! All relate to the prevailing inability of our modern, always electronically "turned on" world to shut up! -- for God's sake hit the mute button!

Today's first reading from the prophet Isaiah would divert our attention from all that noise. It would request a pause, more than moment of silence; that we learn how to listen – deep – because as the chapter says: – *my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways . . . For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, my thoughts higher than your thoughts.* So don't wrack your brain, *just listen*, listen to the silence. *For just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful . . . So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth.*

A memorable philosopher of recent times may have had that passage from Isaiah in mind when he called upon us all to pay attention *to a voice that speaks without sound, . . . that draws out of the superficial loquacity of everydayness a deep resounding word.* It may be that all that we shall hear is silence – so much more fascinating than noise – out of which will come an awareness that needs no words even as love between me and my spouse, me and my son needs no words - unless I have the capacity to speak the way Ben Jonson does – which takes grace.