*Your decrees are wonderful; therefore, my soul keeps them. The unfolding of Your words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple. With an open mouth I pant because I long for Your commandments. Turn to me and be gracious to me, as is Your custom toward those who love Your name. Keep my steps steady according to Your promise, and never let iniquity have dominion over me. Redeem me from human oppression, that I may keep Your precepts. Make Your face shine upon Your servant and teach me Your statutes. My eyes shed streams of tears because Your law is not kept.*

Psalm 119:129-136

*“Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the Lord.’ But I say to you: Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No;’ anything more than this comes from the evil one.* Matthew 5:33-37

*The pastor was talking to a group of young children about being good and going to heaven. At the end of his talk, he asked: "Where do you want to go?"*

*"Heaven!" Suzy cried out.*

*"And what do you have to be to get there?" - asked the preacher, hoping to hear of the importance of being good.*

*Instead, a little Johnny yelled: “you must be dead!"*

We really have to be specific, especially when asking children.

To Be or Not To Be.

1. The words of Hamlet in this best-known monologue in the history of literature were for centuries paraphrased by many people who tried to use them as an inspiration or an advantage. In the past I’ve spent quite a considerable amount of time trying to understand what might have been on the mind of Shakespeare when he wrote this probably best of his dramas. I believe I would not be very far off in concluding that the *“bard*” wanted to show how much we, humans, complicate our lives even though such complications are very often totally unnecessary. I also believe that Shakespeare was inspired by the words of Jesus in the “Sermon on the Mount” in today’s reading, when he wrote his now famous monologue.

2. Jesus said: *“Let your Yes be Yes and your No, No!”* (Mt. 5:37) Nothing more and nothing less. Be yourself, be real and true. Do not try to hide or to complicate what is simple. Jesus was the perfect communicator. Whenever He spoke, He was reaching out to the listeners and the message He would deliver would always *“hit home.”* Jesus knew very well how important it is to be direct in every conversation, and how helpful directness is in every form of communication. Unfortunately, this is not a case anymore in almost every flow of information we as the society are exposed to. The politicians speak in circles, the lawyers use a legal jargon that only a few understand, the media edit the news contents to suit their agendas, so we hear only partial facts, the social media bombards people with all sorts of gossips, lies and innuendos, and even many clergy do not want to offend people, so they too omit some facts or use the language that sounds important but is otherwise like the proverbial *“hot air.”* The colleges and universities in this country are issuing language guides to help students avoid non-inclusive and *"harmful"* words like mother, father, Christmas trees, bunnies, and America. All these are just a few examples of how the society at every level is being directed to pursue a particular ideology. All these moves are designed to control true and honest speech.

3. Many modern families lack the concept of real communication and without even realizing they destroy themselves as social units simply through a wrongful form of communication. Without even realizing what they do, many people attack each other causing mistrust, frustrations, hurt; for example:

- negative responses – almost everything said is countered by a negative response, it is the so called *“that’s not right”* attitude, *“the glass is half empty”* rather than *“half full”* attitude*;*

- sarcasm and cynicism – sarcastic and cynical statements have devastating influence on the person who receives them and yet how many times we hear sarcasm as cynicism from our leaders;

- playing the *“who’s to blame”* game*”* -it is *“his or her fault,”* a game known from the time of creation when Adam blamed Eve while Eve blamed Satan and even God.

4. Today the statistics clearly indicate that we have the greatest number of divorces, single family homes, runaways, sexual, physical, and mental abuses, rampant crime, drug use, and the list goes on and on, from any period of known history. The reason is very simple. People do not have time for each other, they lack the opportunities to share their experiences and to teach each other of the solutions to even most basics problems life throws at them and instead people tend to look for the *“easy ways out.”* What used to be taught at home is taught no more. Schools do not pick up *“the slack,”* neither do many churches, but even if they do, people do not attend church services anymore as it used to be in the past. The pandemic clearly show that the social isolation destroyed the lives of many young people unable to participate in any form of social activities for almost two years, and this included the education system. The attitude of conformity to everything and to everyone, encouraged by the media and the entertainment industries, as well as the political will, created a vacuum in the system of values, and today nothing is *“wrong,”* every behavior, every societal whim, is applauded and encouraged with pride.

5. We may search for reasons that such a situation exists, but this will only partially solve the problem. Yes, to know and to understand the problem is necessary, but if we want to restore the values we cherished for so long as the civilization, we must do something about this, not *“just to talk”* about it. Nobody can deny that both parents are needed to raise a child, but people are afraid to say this aloud because the society will *“skin them alive.”* We all know that drugs destroy our society, but the criminal justice turns the *“blind eye”* on the actions of drug dealers who even when caught receive just a *“slap on the wrist.”* The biology and the medical science teach that the chromosomes X and Y dictate the sex of a person, but today the *“woke”* ideology disputes the science and those who clearly defend the science are labelled *“phobic.”* The list of the examples is almost endless.

6. Jesus plainly states: *“Let your Yes be Yes, and No, No.”* Nothing more, nothing less. The true communication begins when we do not have any hidden agendas while communicating with one another. The true communication starts with empathy, the feeling for the other. The true communication means to talk honestly to each other offering respect, even when we disagree with a particular viewpoint. This principle applies to all human interaction. To the politics, to the social encounters, to the scientific, philosophical, even religious dialogue. The half-truths, the innuendo’s, the falsified researches, the biased polling’s, or the simple politics are nothing else but the lie. “Period.” We need to restore the honesty, integrity and respect for one another. As the Church we are charged with this by Jesus Christ Himself.

7. As Christians, when we face a difficult situation we come to the Lord with it, and He will help us, but we must come to Him honestly. One of the best means of communication with God, if not the best means of communication, is a prayer and in our prayers, we may bring to Him our hurts, our frustrations, our sorrows, and other problems, but this must be a genuine, not a manipulative request. Honesty is the foremost important in any form of communication and we definitely cannot be manipulative in our prayer. God communicated His love to us while we still were sinners, and He continues to communicate His love to us, even when we fail in our endeavors. This principle also applies when we ask others to pray for us. God helps us to communicate with each other, but He also teaches us that we need to accept the others even if they have different thoughts and views from our own. This does not mean that we are to accept their views or opinions, it means that we respect them and agree to disagree. Unfortunately, this is something that is so very difficult to achieve today. Only when we truly express our respect for each other, the ways of communication may be open, and we may peacefully co-exist.

8. When Paul wrote to the Church in Colossus he wrote: *“Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer everyone.”* (Col. 4:6) Some say that the talk is cheap, but the Bible also teaches that the words can kill. Lies, innuendos, half-truths, etc., can kill relationships and lead to a great hurt. I only hope that the world and even the Church may learn from Jesus how to communicate with one another, rather than allow the vague, non-committal language of control so predominant in modern society. May Jesus be the One who leads us in communicating with one another, including God and even the proverbial *“world.”* Jesus said: *“By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”* When we love one another, we want to communicate with one another, not to have to do this.