

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.

Not words from today's Gospel reading, but words from elsewhere in St. Matthew's Gospel. These words of Jesus are often wielded at Christians to shut down any discussion of what is right and wrong, what is virtuous and what is sinful. Any time the Church or an individual Christian points to a certain behaviour as wrong or sinful, inevitably wagging fingers are raised and an indignant tone ensues which says something to the effect, "*now, now.....you're being judgmental! The Bible says, judge not.*

In actual fact, what the passage is saying is not, 'Don't judge', but get right with God *yourself* and understand your *own* sin so that you'll see clearly enough to properly correct someone else's; and in your judgment and correction do not condemn – only God is judge in that sense – or be unmerciful.

In today's Gospel Jesus *instructs* us to speak to a brother or sister who is clearly committing sin and call them to amend their ways. The goal of the discipline he outlines is not embarrass or to heap insults on people, but always to restore relationships; to call lost sinners to repentance and back into fellowship through Christ's forgiveness.

Our modern mentality tends to overlook the fact that God is a God of justice. He has standards. He has norms for how we should behave. He is not the unyielding cosmic policeman or law-enforcer, but nor is he the God who accepts and affirms any and every human behaviour.

He is infinitely merciful and forgiving, but he is not so open-minded that he is empty-headed. There are human actions and attitudes that are intolerable.

This means that we can't simply overlook either our own or others' errors and failings. We must love one another enough to give and receive caring and well-meaning correction.

Admonishing sinners - calling wanderers back to Jesus - is, in the end, a work of mercy. After all, bringing to another person's attention whatever is harming them or others is what true friends and members of a family do for each other.

The task of calling back to Jesus must always begin with ourselves if it is to avoid descending into a blind self-righteousness that only see faults in others but never in ourselves.

As we try to keep others on the straight and narrow, let's ask of ourselves:

Am I striving for holiness and avoiding sin in my own life?

Do I practice what I preach?

And of God the courage and humility to accept correction where we are not.