

## Sermon on Judgment

In this morning's Epistle reading, St. Paul has some **strong** words for us.

He says:

“who are you to pass judgement on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls.”

We all know that God is our Master and that we are His servants, and we know that we will all be judged by Him.

And yet, we seem to have a special gift for usurping God's place as the judge of all.

Let's take a moment and think about how many times during the last 24 hours, we've made judgments about other people. (*pause*)

If you're still counting, you're probably not alone. I think it's safe to say that we all do it. But, for those who are still unsure, It might be helpful to define just what it means to judge.

According to Abba Dorotheos (a 6<sup>th</sup> century monk from Palestine):

“Passing judgment is when you condemn the actual person, saying he or she is a “liar”, or that they are “bad-tempered”, or a “fornicator.” For in saying this, we are condemning the entire disposition of their soul and drawing a conclusion about their whole life, saying that they are like this and condemning them accordingly...”

He goes on to say:

“...It is one thing to say: ‘he or she got angry’ and another to say ‘he or she is bad-tempered and to pass judgment on their whole life.’”

So, we have to be wary of labels: To say someone is a “liar”, a “manipulator” or a “fornicator”...etc., is to make a judgment. And the problem is that we're making judgments about someone when we really don't know them.

Many times we make snap judgments about a person based on gossip and hearsay alone; without knowing whether or not the information we were

given about them was accurate. Even the things we observe with our own eyes are seen with a bias.

Now, one could argue in a particular case: that they've known a person for years, and are familiar with their track record. And so, they might feel justified in making a judgment about them based on that. However, even if we do know of some "questionable things" about a particular person, do we know their heart? No. Only God does.

So, the reason we shouldn't be a judge, is not only because it's "not our job", it's because we're poor judges.

First of all: We don't know a person as well as God does.

And Second: While we're busy making it our business to point out the sins of others, we're often blind to our own.

Our Lord reminds us of this in the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 7, when he says:

"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? <sup>4</sup>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? <sup>5</sup>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. "

Unfortunately, this is not something that we're eager to do. Most of us can "dish out" judgment, but we can't "take it."

And that's because judgment stems from our own weakness, insecurities and fears:

We don't want to see our sin, we don't want to face it, and we certainly don't want others to see it... so what do we do? We point the finger at someone else's faults to divert attention away from us. But, the funny thing is, judging is often self-revealing. Most of the time, we criticize the faults in others that also exist in ourselves.

St. Paul says this clearly in Romans Chapter 2:

“Thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.”

Feel convicted yet?

So, what do we do about our inclination to judge others?

Quite simply, we have to take that critical eye that focuses on everyone else and turn it inward. We have to examine ourselves.

Indeed, it begs the question: Do we really know ourselves? Do we see ourselves as sinners? If we don't, then a change is in order. Because our salvation depends on us taking the blindfold off and seeing ourselves for who we really are. We need to discover what sins we are committing so that we can repent of them.

Now, as we do this, bear in mind that the temptation to go back to judging others will not leave us. There will always be gossip around us and people inviting us to join in with it and driving us to judge. But when that temptation arises, I encourage you to call to mind this story about St. Moses the Ethiopian. You may have heard it before, but it is certainly worth repeating.

The story goes like this:

“A brother of a Skete (a small monastic community) once committed a sin, and a council was held by the brethren to judge the matter. They sent for Abba Moses, but he did not wish to come. The Presbyter again sent for him saying: ‘Come, for we are all waiting for you.’ Then Abba Moses arose and took a basket with holes in the bottom, filled it with sand, and carried it back to the meeting. The Fathers came out to meet him, and when they saw him carrying the basket on his shoulders, they asked him: ‘What is this Father?’ The Elder replied to them: ‘They are my sins that are flowing out behind me, and I do not see them; and yet, I have come today to judge someone else’s sins.’ When they heard this they said nothing to the brother whom they wished to judge, but forgave him.”

So, let's keep the finger pointed at ourselves. Not at others. As St. Nilus, said: "The beginning of salvation is to condemn yourself." In fact, the more we focus on our own sins, the better everyone else will look.

Now, all of this is **not** to say that when we witness a wrong that we should not correct someone.

For example, St. John Chrysostom points out:

"Someone will say, "If a person commits fornication, shall I not say that such behavior is wrong, nor correct the person who acts indecently? You must certainly correct him, but not like an adversary, nor as an enemy seeking revenge but rather as a physician preparing medication."

In other words, when we correct, we should do so with love, not with judgment or condemnation. We should correct a brother or sister whose sin has put them in danger. That's part of our calling: To "bear one another's burden's" and look out for and care for each other and help each other as we all struggle with sin.

True Christians don't mock, draw attention to, or make light of another's fall; we grieve for the person and help them rise.

Afterall, Christ did not say, "do not correct a sinner", but he said: "do not judge."

As I said, that's His job. And God's a far better judge than any of us. He was wise to tell us:

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged."

I don't know about you, but when, I'm at my worst, I'm a pretty mean judge. So, I'd much rather have Christ as the Judge. He's far more loving and compassionate than I'll ever be.

Brothers and Sisters, always remember: God is the judge. So, let him **BE** the judge.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit one God  
amen.