

A store manager returned from lunch to find her clerk bandaging up his hand. Before she could ask him about the bandage, the clerk announced, “Good news! I finally sold that really ugly suit we’ve had hanging on the sales rack for so long!” “You mean that repulsive pink-and-lime-green striped polyester leisure suit?” “That’s it!” The clerk beamed. “Great job!” the manager said. “I don’t know how you did it. That’s the ugliest suit this store has ever carried. By the way, what happened to your hand?” “Oh,” the clerk said, “after I sold the guy that suit, his seeing-eye-dog bit me.”

First, let’s look at this gospel. Jesus offers 5 parables or analogies in this passage, and the most important one is Jesus’ poking fun at pride and our sense of superiority by saying, “Can a blind person guide a blind person?” The image of the blind leading the blind is straight out of Charlie Chaplin, the Three Stooges, or Monty Python.

When Jesus says to “remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter in your brother’s eye,” His point is, of course, that it’s much easier to see others’ faults than our own – which is a basic principle of psychology and common sense. We often are blind to our own faults in the very act of criticizing others. Now you know I’d rather step on my lips than criticize another priest. But can you believe that Fr. Scott Mc Cue at St. Michael’s preaches over 5 minutes?! Can you imagine that?! Anyone who thinks he can preach over 5 minutes is obviously a total idiot! But I’m not one to criticize.....just making an innocent observation. STAY OUT OF ST. MICHAEL’S!

Jesus is deliberately poking fun at pride here in using an outrageous image like a log in the eye. If we take the analogy literally, as a robot or a computer would, we will think it really stupid: logs don’t fit into eyes. But that would only prove our own stupidity. The point is not literal but analogical; as a log is much bigger than a splinter, so our own faults are much bigger than the fault we criticize in others.

Jesus used that principle in dealing with the woman caught in adultery and her accusers, who demanded the death penalty of stoning. Jesus replied, “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (John 8:7). People who live in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones. But we DO like the sound of breaking glass!

The same point can be seen in a joke about 4 monks who all took a vow of silence. The 4 of them were walking down the road when one stubbed his toe on a rock and said “Dang!” The 2<sup>nd</sup> turned to him and said, “You idiot! You broke your vow of silence!” the 3<sup>rd</sup> said to the 2<sup>nd</sup>, “You’re a bigger idiot than he is; you broke your vow of silence in telling him that he broke his!” The 4<sup>th</sup> just smiled and said, “I’m the only one who didn’t.”

Pride is the most laughable thing in the world because it’s the stupidest. And the stupidest form of pride is being proud of our humility. That’s like being judgmental about other people’s judgmentalism. We’ve all seen fools like that – if we have mirrors. (adapted from Kreeft, FOOD FOR THE SOUL, C, p. 425)

Look – it doesn’t matter how we think we are doing with our faith. If it doesn’t’ make us more compassionate, more loving, more aware of people’s pain, and more moved to alleviate that pain, we’re not about God stuff – and it’s not going to matter to the vast majority of human beings we encounter, who consider religion to be at best superfluous and at worst, toxic. This is the biggest disconnect for people who’ve lost or thrown away their religion or temporarily misplaced it: They can’t take the hypocrisy. They can’t reconcile hateful people peddling a God of love, and they refuse to be told they have to. They will not

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abide intolerance no matter who the person perpetuating it is passing the buck to. They're our exhausted, frustrated neighbors demanding a little Golden Rule kindness and love, they are the people we imagine we have nothing in common with, those we believe are our adversaries. Jesus is there in them – disguised as the least of these. (adapted from John Pavlovitz, IF GOD IS LOVE, DON'T BE A JERK, p. 57)

Second, what's the issue? Why is it we can see and expound on the slightest fault of our neighbor while we are blind to our own staggering imperfections? At least part of the answer is: it is a matter of our outward focus on others. We have fine-tuned our observations of others. We do not miss even the tiniest of their flaws. However, we are not well trained in self-observation. So we do not see ourselves clearly.

This is a serious lack. Spiritual traditions always teach that we are complicit in our perceptions and decisions. We are not paragons of objectivity, passing neutral judgments on what we see. Rather, our minds have biases, tapes, and storylines that enter into everything we say and do. If we do not know what these are, we are ignorant. Without this self-knowledge, we tend to paint perfect pictures of ourselves or, even more dangerously, innocent pictures of ourselves. Then we view the imperfect world around us as if we were not part of it. We live in disdain rather than compassion. The only effective way to help our neighbor improve ever-so-slightly is to share the story of our own need for conversion.

There is a story told about Gandhi that illustrates this point. A woman brought her granddaughter to Gandhi and commanded, "My granddaughter eats too much sugar. Tell her to stop."

Gandhi said, "Bring her back to me next week."

The grandmother and granddaughter returned next week. But Gandhi again put them off, saying the same thing, "Bring her back to me next week." This happened 3 times.

Finally Gandhi said to the granddaughter, "You should not eat so much sugar. It is not good for you."

The grandmother was furious. "We waited 4 weeks and made 4 trips for this simple remark?"

"Ah!" Gandhi sighed. "It took me that long to stop eating too much sugar myself."

The only way to help our neighbor is to share the story of our own struggles. (adapted from Shea, THE RELENTLESS WIDOW, YEAR C, p. 52-53)

Third and finally, we are all students – we are not the teachers when it comes to the love of Christ and serving Him in our brothers and sisters. There has yet to be a disciple of Jesus who started perfectly, went through training, and kept improving. We start from where we are, blindness and all, and we learn, grow, fall back, stumble, and are restored. It's a continual process of conversion and transformation. Our problem is that we usually start fixing the wrong issue first when we're off course. We want to fix our behaviors and direction before addressing what's going inside. So, where do we begin? Jesus wants to use His teaching to reset our hearts. We have to admit that we are blind and have no idea which way to go. Thomas Merton has a prayer that is very helpful here.

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.

I do not see the road ahead of me.

I cannot know for certain where it will end.

Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think I am following your will

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Does not mean that I am actually doing so.

But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you.

And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.

I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.

And I know that if I do this, you will lead me by the right road, though I may know nothing about it.

Therefore I will trust you always, though

I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death.

I will not fear, for you are ever with me,

And you will never leave me to face my perils alone.

We need to resist the temptation to judge others based on outward appearances, success, or fame. We're all struggling to follow the thin, bony man from Nazareth – and His way is difficult and challenging. It requires picking up a cross – and zipping up our mouths. It means looking for the good and overlooking the bad. It means compassion, love, forgiveness, inclusivity, and care for the poor, the immigrant, the lonely and forgotten. If we get that right, we'll be on the right path, even with all our mistakes, sins, and hypocrisies. Amen. (last point help from GRACEWORKS, 2 March 2025, p. 30)