Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



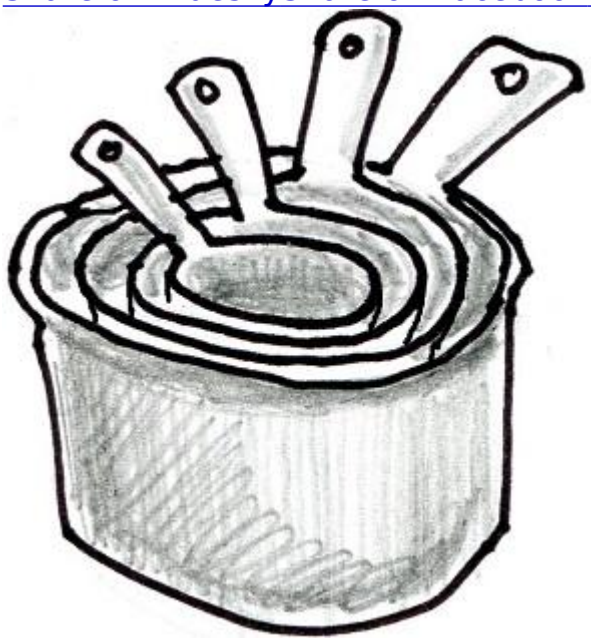
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“Stop judging, that you may not be judged” (Matt 7:1).

Gn 12:1-9; Mt 7:1-5

Pope Francis could not have been clearer in expressing his desire that the church turn a more merciful face to the world than when he startled reporters - and not a

few of his fellow bishops - with the now famous reply to a question about gay members of the church: “Who am I to judge?” If the pope, one of the great moral teachers in the world, declines to pass judgment, how can any of us put ourselves in that place of superior insight and authority over another human being?

This does not mean that certain actions cannot be judged sinful or unjust, as the pope demonstrated on another occasion after visiting Sicily and the victims of violence by the Italian crime syndicates. The pope declared: "Those who go down the evil path, as the Mafiosi do, are not in communion with God. They are excommunicated" (cbsnews.com, June 21, 2014).

Condemnation is reserved for the most heinous crimes, even if we cannot judge the motives or freedom of the individuals who commit them (and knowing reconciliation is always possible with conversion).

Jesus also condemned some types of behaviors, especially abusing the innocent, scandalizing the weak, or acting hypocritically. In today’s Gospel, he addresses one of the most common but debilitating patterns within every human personality – the impulse to judge others. Jesus warns against this not just because it makes mutual forgiveness that much harder, but because those who judge are actually boxing themselves into their own judgments.

“The measure with which you measure will be measured out to you,” Jesus insists. People who are constantly judging others become trapped by their own imagined standards and spend all of their time and energy keeping track of other people’s faults. Judgmental people are always right. Who wants to be around them? They cannot allow themselves the freedom to admit mistakes, to apologize, let go and start over, which is the essence and joy of the church of mercy the pope is calling for.

We are invited to begin today with a general amnesty. Let forgiveness prevail, and you will be surprised by how unburdened and free you will feel. A day without judging is a day of grace, and it is ours for the asking.