

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Oct 14th 2015

The first sentence of today's first reading is: You are without excuse, every one of you who passes judgment and the rest of the reading makes it clear that he means passing judgment on others. Is Paul telling us to "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil", to be naive and undiscerning? Part of the prophetic role of the baptized is precisely that: to be prophetic, not to abstain from taking positions. Part of our being sent is to call evil what is evil and good what is good. But this does not necessarily mean that we have to set ourselves up as judges of others.

In the English language a pertinent distinction is offered in the use of two different words, namely, critiquing and criticizing. They both have the same etymological root in the Greek verb *krinein*, but they have different meanings. We critique products: books, poetry, paintings, music... We critique actions, strategies, principles... The moment we pass from products to persons, from actions to agents, we are no longer critiquing, we are criticizing. And in criticizing we are setting ourselves up as judges of our brothers and sisters, we become "personal" in our passing judgment. We are able to critique products, because, at least to some extent, we can "measure" their quality. But we do not have any sure gauge to measure the intention and heart of the agent, as distinct from the action itself, and so to criticize the person.

Paul's injunction envisages criticizing, not simple critiquing and it amounts to an injunction to avoid condemning. We are privileged to live at this time in the Church's history, when Pope Francis proclaims mercy as the guiding light of his ministry and acts accordingly. In less than two months ?December 8th? we will begin the extraordinary Holy Year of Mercy, an extraordinary jubilee year announced by him earlier this year and certainly not condemning belongs fully in the context of such year.

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