

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Feb 25th 2013

In various parts of the gospels the disciples are asked to be discerning, not naive. Part of the Church's prophetic role is indeed to pass judgment on what is taking place around us, calling good what is good and evil what is evil. Yet in today's gospel reading, the Lord tells the disciples –and us– Stop judging and you will not be judged. Are we looking at a contradiction?

Fortunately the English language, or at least my understanding of it, provides us with a helpful way to clear this seeming contradiction. We have two different verbs with the same Greek root (*krinein*), but with two quite different meanings. The two verbs are critiquing and criticizing.

We critique performances, actions, works of art, writings... and in doing so we pass objective judgment on things. When we criticize, we envisage persons and in so doing we pass subjective judgment on the goodness or wrongness of their intentions, which are often unknown to us. We do need to critique, in order to avoid being uncritical or naive. But in criticizing we are setting ourselves up as judges of people's intentions, which is the Lord's prerogative: the Father... has entrusted all judgment to the Son [Jn. 5: 22].

Part of the prophetic role of the Church is precisely critiquing developments and actions taking place around us, while respecting the people involved. Even within the Church we all bear a responsibility to critique positions and decisions taken. But when we cross the line that separates critiquing from criticizing, we are contributing to the existing polarization, which itself needs being critiqued, yet without criticizing those who hold different positions.

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