

**If you judge people,
you have no time
to love them."**
--Mother Teresa

In my previous ministry as one of the administrators of the Redemptorists, part of my work involved a great deal of travel to be in contact with the confreres, and to attend various meetings. I would travel to some of the islands in the Caribbean three or four times a year. Some of my friends would tease me about this and say that I used American Airlines as if it were the subway. I would immediately get defensive and explain that it was for business and the travel was something I did not like. They would smile and say, *Sure Father. How could you always come home with sunburn? I wish I had a job like you.*

When we had our parish block party, a senior citizen asked me to get her a hamburger. The line for food was still long and I got on it. Some of the parishioners, being very kind and compassionate, told me to go to the head of the line since I was the pastor. I thanked them and said no, not because I was trying to be humble but simply I did not want to be criticized for taking advantage of my position. To make matters worse, at the end of the party, we asked a child to draw the winning ticket for the 50/50 with the prize being nearly \$500.00. The little girl handed me the ticket and the name on it was Father Woods. Someone had bought a ticket for me. Lest I be investigated by the CIA and the FBI, I tore up the ticket and we pulled another. I truly love my vocation as a priest, but I would be the first to admit that it is very hard, and I often fail, to live up to the expectations that people rightly have for their clergy.

The most difficult relationships that our Lord Jesus had as we read the Gospels were with the religious figures of the Jewish community. Certainly, many of them were outstanding men who loved God with all their hearts and sought to serve their people with love and mercy. However, many of the spiritual leaders had grown corrupt, were overly legalistic, and very harsh on the people, as they seemed to make it more difficult for their followers to know and love God. Some of the harshest language that Jesus used was toward the Pharisees and Sadducees because he could see that they were not serving others but taking care of themselves. In the Gospels, we hear Jesus say, *they tie up heavy burdens hard to carry and lay them on people's shoulders, but they will not lift a finger to move them. All their works are performed to be seen. Jesus called the religious leadership at times hypocrites, snakes, and whited sepulchers.*

You might have read the story that occurred a couple of years ago, where a bishop in Europe created lavish surroundings for himself, including a golden bathtub. Pope Francis removed the man from his office and told him to do penance. We know well the dark scandals and cover ups of the evil deeps of religious figures in our church. Through the years, I have met people who have told me that they left the Catholic church because they were yelled at or treated unfairly by a priest. All I could say to them was that no one bishop or priest is the church; we are always a sinful human church, while at the same guided by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Most of us are quick to notice and condemn hypocrisy in any form. Such judgments are not only directed at the clergy. We see such behaviors in political leaders especially those who have different political views than do we, in the media, in the Hollywood stars who want to tell us how we should live, in athletes who make millions of dollars as they say how unfairly they are treated and so forth.

Hypocrisy and inconsistent actions should be challenged. But, we must be careful in our judgments; the old saying that when we point one finger at another person, we have four pointing back at us is very true. Parents often tell their children to act in certain ways that they themselves do not do. When a child lets loose with some vulgar words, we will, and rightly so, tell them not to speak that way. But perhaps, we might watch our own vocabulary. None of us like people who say one thing and do another, but I

think we often find ourselves acting in similar ways. We are quick to condemn the faults and failures of others without seeing our own. I have often met people who can say with a straight face that they never gossip about another. I am not sure if I should canonize them as saints or tell them *you gotta be kidding*.

We are all sinners. The Bible tells us that the just person fails seven times a day. Jesus we know had great compassion and mercy toward sinners. They were welcomed home with great love. His anger is with those who are blind to the own sins and focused on the sins of others.

I heard a story about a man in a very rural part of Ireland. It was totally without the slightest modern tools and household items. The man goes to the county fair and for the first time in his life, he sees a mirror. He is amazed at this object. He looks at it and says to himself: *It is a picture of my father. Where did they ever get that*. He buys it and brings it home. However, he hides from his wife because she never liked his father. The wife suspects something is up because she senses something has happened to her husband. She begins to think he is sneaking off to another woman because he keeps disappearing to go look at his mirror. Finally, she searches the house and find the hidden mirror. She looks at it and grows very angry. *I knew it*, she says. *He does have a woman on the side and its old hag*. She confronts him, and great argument breaks out between them as to whether the image is his father or an old woman, Finally, they seek the parish priest to resolve the matter. Father O'Malley comes in, looks at the mirror and say, *you are both wrong-it old Paddy Murphy who hangs down at the pub*.

Before we condemn and judge others, Jesus always invites us to look into the mirror. We look to know our own sins and to call upon him for mercy and forgiveness. *Judge not and you will not be judged*.