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

*Gen 12:1-9; Matt 7:1-5*

Getting something in my eye when I was a kid could set my father in motion with his tried-and-true method for getting it out. Roll the eyelid back with a small cardboard match, then fish out the offending object with the corner of a tissue. He was like the father in the movie “Christmas Story” changing a tire. It was something his father had done for him and he was eager to demonstrate. For me it was torture, but it got the job done. My mother was an expert at using a hot needle and tweezers to work out a sliver in my finger. I just had to hold still.

Today’s Gospel about the mote and the beam reminded me that the mote felt like a beam because it was in *my* eye, so close I couldn’t see past it. It was huge! Jesus used the image and the aphorism to warn his disciples that passing judgment on others reveals more about you than about them. “It takes one to know one,” another saying, reveals the truth that the faults we can identify in others are the ones we have in ourselves. So, judge not lest you be judged. The standard or measure we set for others will be used on us.

The something in your eye that distorts your vision of others is usually yourself. We are so close to ourselves, we block everything else out or we put such a personal

spin on all our perceptions that what we see in others, especially to criticize, is usually about us. Thomas Aquinas put this principle of subjectivity simply: "Whatever is received into something is received according to the condition of the receiver."

Jesus wanted his disciples to be free of this kind of self-entrapment. Not to need to pass judgment on others is a great grace and real freedom if we can do it. Judgmental people end up cornering themselves within their high standards, which requires them to keep track of other people's faults to maintain their system of self-righteousness. Jesus saw the paralysis this created in the scribes and Pharisees. Instead of guiding people to God, they set up a thicket of rules around a wall of laws behind which God was inaccessible to everyone except the perfect.

Pope Francis made news around the world when he said, "Who am I to judge?" on a topic many others are quick to judge. If God does not judge us, who are we to judge one another? He set the tone for his papacy and revealed its central theme that God is merciful. Making God the enforcerr of our systems of morality prevents us from accessing mercy when we really need it.

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