

On Judging

The Desert Fathers and Mothers based their life and prayer on the teaching of Jesus. The Beatitudes were their Commandments. They experienced personally that one of the most difficult things to do in life is not to judge others. Therefore they took to heart Jesus' saying in the Sermon on the Mount '*Pass no judgement and you will not be judged.*' We hear in the '*Sayings of the Desert Fathers*': "*The old men used to say, 'there is nothing worse than passing judgment.'*" They knew the mind and heart of their fellow human beings; they were superb psychologists. They knew that in judging others we are actually subconsciously judging ourselves. These are uncomfortable feelings, which we therefore project out onto others. In fact, the behaviour we criticize others for is potentially our own: "*Never point a finger of scorn or judgment at your fellow man because when you point, there are three fingers pointing back at you.*" (Bear Heart – '*The Wind is my Mother*')

Our tendency to gossip about, judge and criticize others actually shows our own unresolved woundedness and conditioning, shaped by others when we were young. Recognizing our wounds and accepting them leads to the '*purifying of the emotions*', one of the aims of the spiritual journey: "*Interior freedom is not yet possessed by anyone who cannot close his eyes to the fault of a friend, whether real or apparent.*" (Maximus the Confessor) This story from the Desert exemplifies the needed attitude: *A brother committed a fault. A council was called to which Abba Moses was invited, but he refused to go to it. Then the priest sent someone to say to him, 'Come, for everyone is waiting for you'. So he got up and went. He took a leaking jug, filled it with water, and carried it with him. The others came out to meet him and said to him, 'What is this, Father?' The old man said to them, 'My sins run out behind me, and I do not see them, and today I am coming to judge the error of another.'* When they heard that they said no more to the brother but forgave him.

Moreover, in judging others we take a freeze-frame of them; we trap them in a particular moment in time, not allowing them the possibility of progress and growth, which can actually happen in an instant: "*Abba Xanthias said, 'The thief was on the cross and he was justified by a single word; and Judas who was counted among the number of the apostles lost all his labour in one single night and descended from heaven to hell.'*" (Stories from the Desert Fathers)

Meditation is instrumental in acquiring this non-judgmental, more compassionate attitude. And yet, especially in meditation we often criticize ourselves: "*Why is my mind always filled with thoughts? Why can't I sit still?*" Do not judge. Don't get hooked by your thoughts or overwhelmed by your feelings. Just accept the way it is. Just observe and

name what goes through your mind and gently return to your mantra. Become an impartial observer. This approach soon becomes an integral part of our being and leads to detachment, compassion and awareness.