

8th SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

It is easy to see another's weaknesses and faults, but a psychological wall prevents us from seeing our own. Each of us has a plank in our eyes which binds us to our faults. We can be blind to certain facts about ourselves which are perfectly clear to anyone who has ever lived in the same house with us or worked in the same office.

Once there was a young monk who committed a serious fault. Immediately the older monks assembled in community to pass judgement on him. However they wouldn't proceed until their abbot joined them. So they sent him a message: "Come, the community is waiting for you."

The abbot arose, and taking an old basket which was riddled with holes, he filled it with fine sand. Then he started off, carrying the basket behind him. Naturally, as he went along, he left a trail of sand in his wake.

The elders came out to meet him and asked him what he meant by this. And he replied, "My sins are running out behind me. Everywhere I go I leave a trail of faults after me, only most of the time I don't see them myself. And today you want me to sit in judgement on my brother."

On hearing this the elders felt ashamed of themselves. They abandoned the trial and pardoned their brother.

Without realising it we can become professional fault-finders and critics. But critics are not the ones who reform the world. Jesus tells us to take the beam out of our own eye first, and then we can think about removing the splinter from our neighbour's eye. We must put our own house in order first before daring to try to put someone else's house in order. If we neglect to do this, we will not judge our brother or sister out of care, but in hatred, and wishing to expose him or her. There are few things that give as much satisfaction to the ego as pointing out the mistakes and faults of others.

A leader can only lead if he sees the way himself. The teacher can only impart what he himself has learned. If one is to avoid being a blind guide one must exercise self-criticism.

How anxious we are to correct others. If only we could tell so and so about that fault of his, and get him to see the error of his ways, how fine our community would be. When we think like this we are really thinking only of ourselves. But how we hate and dread being corrected ourselves! We find it unbearable, especially if it is done by certain people.

An old sailor gave up smoking when his pet parrot developed a persistent cough. He was worried that the pipe smoke which frequently filled the room had damaged the parrot's health – a victim of passive smoking! He had a vet examine the bird. After a thorough check-up the vet concluded that the parrot did not have psittacosis or pneumonia. It had merely been imitating the cough of its pipe-smoking master.

Pseudo-religion, which Jesus calls hypocrisy, is forever trying to make other people better. True religion tries to make oneself better.