

# Maronite Monks of Adoration

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*"Judge not, that you be not judged." (Mt 7:1).*

Believe it or not, in order to begin to understand this passage from the Sermon on the Mount, we must make several judgments. Only then will our Savior's prohibition be made sensible.

First of all, we can learn from our own experience that making judgments is both natural and necessary for us. To judge is the way our intellect puts things together or divides them. For example, we can say: "The sky is clear." That's a judgment putting together "the sky" and "clear". Again, walking down the street, heading for your favorite restaurant, you discover: "It's not open." That judgment divides the restaurant ("it") and "open".

It seems that we generally make 3 types of judgments:

- 1) about the truth of things
- 2) about the truth of words
- 3) and about the truth of morals

## The truth of things

When we judge the truth about things we might say something like: "This is bread." If our Lord were to forbid making this type of judgment, we couldn't even make breakfast. We would be prohibited to distinguish bacon and bagels, salt from sugar, or food from poison. Practically speaking, everything would be a disaster.



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## The truth of words

Most humor depends on a wordplay. The ability to appreciate this type of joke depends on a judgment of words. For example:

**Q:** *How can you tell a dogwood tree from a maple tree?*

**A:** *The bark.*

If you laughed, you understood the play on words (*dogwood* and *bark*). But, if our Lord was speaking against this type of judgment, then

you had better get to confession! Obviously, all communication depends on making this type of judgment. Otherwise, we couldn't tell the difference between what is true and what is false—we couldn't even use the Gospel to guide our lives, and all human discourse would be meaningless.

## The truth of morals

An example of this type of judgment might be: "Abortion is evil." Without the possibility of making this judgment, we would be unable to distinguish good from evil, justice from injustice, happiness from misery. There would be no difference between consecrated virginity and profligacy—ultimately, there would be no value in distinguishing Heaven from hell. This would be the end of everything.

In the public forum, it is both natural and

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necessary to judge about actions committed against the just order of society. This provides us with a way to preserve the common good, condemn wicked deeds, punish those proven guilty of them and to free the innocent.

What our Lord prohibits is any unjust judgment that we make individually in our heart. This is opposed to justice and charity, even opposed to God Himself, whose authority we usurp.

St. Augustine explains: “Concerning those things which are known to God but *unknown* to us, if we judge our neighbor, we do so with great danger.

About this type of judgment our Lord says: ‘Judge not ....’ But about those things which are open and public evils, we are able and ought to judge and refute, but with charity and love, hating not the man but the sin, detesting the vice and the sickness, not the one who is ill.”

If the public sins and evils were not judged and castigated, our silence about them would foster their growth and promote them in others. In some cases, if you cannot excuse the action, you might excuse the intention. But even if the intention can’t be excused, then we must redouble our efforts in prayer and penance. After all, we are our brother’s keeper. Sometimes it might be possible gently to rebuke a brother. Remember, to correct the erring is a spiritual work of mercy. But never exclude someone from the charity of your prayer. To do so is not to pray, it is a sin.

### The image of God

What then is the reason for this difference in judgments, some we can make, others not? Only

one reason: the image of God impressed on the soul.

The image of God in our soul distinguishes us from all other creatures on earth, for no other

creature is given the capacity to remember, know and love God. This trinity of powers (memory, understanding and will) in unity of substance makes us an image of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For this reason, we are capable of making judgments about things, about words and about morals, so as to fulfill the basic command of God:

*“Depart from evil,*

*and do good.”* (Ps 34:14).

For the same reason, i.e., the image of God in our soul, we are prohibited from judging our neighbor. Why? Because, if my neighbor is made in the image of God, then he is not made in the image of me. I am not in a position to call him to account. I am not competent to assess how well or ill he corresponds to that image. That is hidden from me.

Therefore, if we begin to wonder, to suspect, to pass judgment on another, that is the time for curiosity to stop up its mouth and exclaim, instead, with St. Paul:

*“O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?’ ‘Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?’ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory for ever. Amen.”*

(Rom 11:33-36). ❖

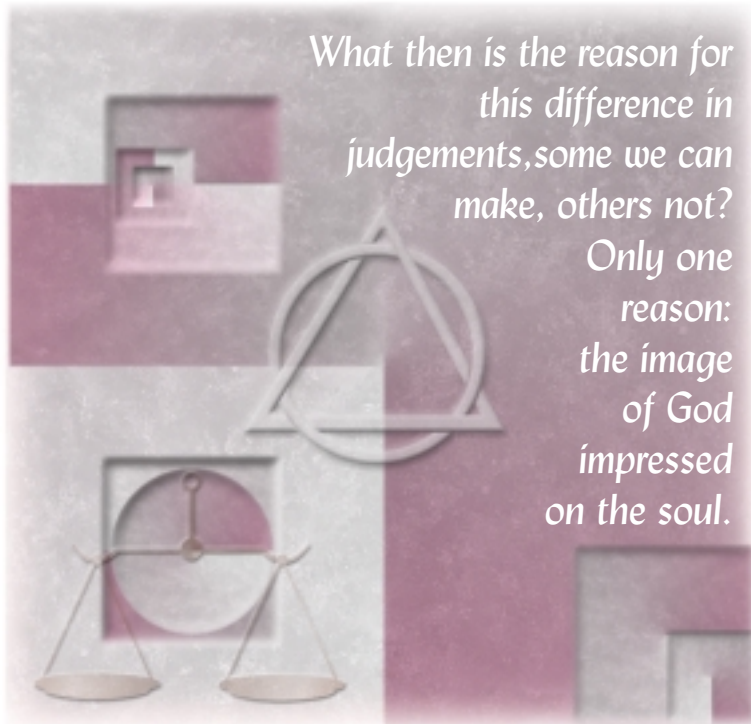


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