

OPENING PRAYER

Good and gracious God, You know the mind and probe the heart. You know our thoughts and our motives. Teach us not to fear this topic of “destructive criticism.” Help us in this team lesson, as an Institute dedicated to God’s Will, and as a person striving to become more like Jesus Christ in all things, that we will take to heart the lesson, value each other’s contributions, have the courage to speak truth in charity, and to love one another as you love us. May our lesson today, give us grace to receive one another in the spirit of Jesus Christ and to seek more deeply the path to heaven. We ask this through Jesus, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

(The Prophet Sirach offers some ecclesiastical wisdom about the topic of criticism) “The poor man’s wisdom lifts his head high and sets him among princes. Praise not a man for his looks; despise not a man for his appearance. Least is the bee among winged things, but she reaps the choicest of all harvests. Mock not the worn cloak and jibe at no man’s bitter day: for strange are the works of the Lord, hidden from men his deeds. The oppressed often rise to a throne, and some that none would consider wear a crown [...] Before investigating, find no fault; examine first, then criticize. Before hearing, answer not, and interrupt no one in the middle of his speech. Dispute not about what is not your concern; in the strife of the arrogant take no part [...] Wisdom and understanding and knowledge of love and virtuous paths are from the Lord. Error and darkness were formed with sinners from their birth, and evil grows old with evildoers. The Lord’s gift remains with the just; his favor brings continued success.” *(Sirach 11:1 ff)*

(Fr. Parents encourages people to seek perfection by avoiding destructive criticism) “To accomplish the plan of God is to live the best of ourselves each day [...] Our vocation on earth is to live love; it is to allow others to speak to us of love; it is to welcome love and to spread it to those around us. Love has three levels of

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perfection: (i) to treat others as we treat ourselves, to love one another as we love ourselves *(JN 13:34)* (ii) to love others as Jesus loved us [...] to give our lives for those we love. *(JN 15:13)*; (iii) to love one another as the Father loves the Son *(MT 17:5)*. [...] The great risk that can stop us from attaining love is *destructive criticism* which makes us destroyers. Destroyers are incapable of profound love; they lose sight of God’s plan and seek imitations of love wherever they see it be in emotivity, or in the dissoluteness of their passions. We see them running from deception to deception, their mouths twisted in bitterness.” *(Footsteps, pp34-35)*

(Citing a Christian classic, Fr. Parent reminds us) “What we cannot correct in ourselves or others we must support with patience until the Lord changes things [...] Strive to patiently support the faults and infirmities of others whatever they may be because you also give others many things to endure. If you are not able to become what you would like to be, how can you change others according to your desires? *(Thomas a Kempis, Imitation of Christ, Par 16)*.

AWARENESS OF DESTRUCTIVE CRITICISM IN ME

“Often we criticize because we are jealous or frustrated, as when we are waiting for others to consult us and they do not [...] we project our own state of soul onto others [...] Goodness is surely the most visible manifestation of the presence of God. The day we are no longer tempted to judge others unfavorably or harshly, our relationships with them will become marvelous. *(Footsteps, pp 38-40)*

I OBSERVE

We must know the definition of destructive criticism if we want to avoid it and to protect our love of God and neighbor, and to consider the presence of God as the most important means of remaining faithful to our Christian vocation. *(Footsteps, p 35)*

I EVALUATE MY WAY OF LIVING

(1) If I am discerning the difference between constructive and destructive criticism, have I taken responsibility to practice improving my abilities to “critique” as Christ would?

(2) To live with absence of “destructive criticism” will transform challenging relationships for the better. Have I been able to improve my relationship with challenging individuals?

(3) Destructive criticism of others usually begins with a banal, small disagreement or reaction. The virtue of humility can help us. How do I ask God for a proper understanding of humility in order to be less destructive in my “natural” reaction to criticize?

(4) Do I prayerfully consider the damaging effects of criticism, and how we criticize others and bless the Lord with the same tongue? (Footsteps, 44)

I GO FURTHER IN MY COMMITMENT

The habit of criticizing does not take away our spiritual language but it destroys fervor, the taste of perfection and the desire for intimate union with God. Let us learn to aim at the essential [...] Let us look beyond the misadventures that happen along the way. Let us endeavor to go right to the heart of God and our neighbors to reach the richness of their being. (Footsteps, p 46)

FURTHER DISCUSSION

It is said that Hitler’s hate for Jews began with a small experience of negative treatment from some Jewish people (Footsteps, 38). How have we made small negative experiences into insurmountable mountains?

Those trying to trick Jesus with questions about paying taxes were “close to Jesus but not in His presence.” (Footsteps, 42). How can we sometimes act similarly – saying that we are Christians but not acting as Christ did?

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We may say something nice about someone, then use the word “BUT” to say something damaging. (Footsteps, 48). How can we avoid such an easy tendency toward this hypocrisy?

(Saint Teresa of Avilla, who celebrates her 500th Birthday Anniversary offers humble counsel to Christians on this topic of destructive criticism). “Let us look at our own shortcomings and leave other people’s alone; for those who live carefully ordered lives are apt to be shocked at everything, and we might well learn very important lessons from the person who shock us.” (Teresa of Avila)

CLOSING PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we trust in your compassion and mercy, especially for times when we have been destructive in our criticism – towards others and even to ourselves. Teach us compassion. Teach us true Christian love. Open our eyes so that we can remove the plank in our own, before obsessing about the speck in our neighbor’s. Give us confidence in You, so that we may not depend on ourselves in how to observe, judge or comment about others. Forgive us as we forgive others. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil of destructive criticism in our lives - today and everyday. With the prayers of our Blessed Mother, our patron saints, and the prayers of our Voluntas Dei Institute around the world, we ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.