*Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your dwelling place, no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent. For He will command His angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone. You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample under foot. Those who love me, I will deliver; I will protect those who know my name. When they call to me, I will answer them; I will be with them in trouble; I will rescue them and honor them. With long life I will satisfy them and show them my salvation.* Psalm 91:9-16

*“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged. For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? Or how can you say to your neighbor ‘Let me take the speck out of your eye,’ while the log is in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbors eye. “Do not give what is holy to dogs; and do not throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under foot and turn and maul you.*

Matthew 7:1-5

*After two weeks of Pre-Kindergarten, Linda’s 5-year-old grandson came home with a mighty big compliment. Nick told his grandmother that he was the smartest kid in the class. With a deep sense of pride, Linda asked him if that was what his teacher said. Nick replied: “No, I had to tell her.”*

The Eye, the Log, and the Sliver.

1. In just a couple of weeks we will go to the polls and once again another political campaign will be over. For the past few months once again we have been witnessing how quickly and how easily people may formulate their opinions, and this does not include only the politicians, the journalists, the entertainers, but even the religious leaders and the ordinary folks. How easily the people, as the species, are willing to criticize others and to claim that only they have the *“only right, and true solution,”* to see this country flourish. It is however regretful that in all this criticism, majority of the people do not offer the so-called *“constructive criticism,”* but a criticism for the sake of criticism itself. In my vocabulary all such people are categorized as the: *“opinionated,”* but not necessarily the *“knowledgeable.”* I guess, the appropriate term would be the political *“armchair quarterbacks.”*

2. I believe that most, if not all of us know people who are always ready to complain and who are always critical of others. Such people have embraced the negative expectation from life and from others, always finding a fault in everything and in everyone. They are the true representatives of the proverbial *“glass half empty”* attitude. Nowhere this is more visible today than in the *“courts of the political or journalistic echelons.”* We have seen and heard so many people during this campaign, who, when speaking of the initiatives of the *“other side,”* criticized the position and the person, without considering the reality or the needs of the people and of the country and driven only by the party affiliation. I never imagined that 40+ years later I will have to encounter in the USA the same reality as we faced under the communist regime when I was growing up in Poland. And yet, so many Americans today embrace the ideology we fought to defeat for over 40 years, ever since the communist regime has been enforced upon us. The question is, is it a blindness of the people or the stupidity.

3. When I consider the words of Jesus who already then, two thousand years ago said: *“Do not judge, so that you may not be judged,”* nothing however surprises me anymore. Jesus addressed the issue of being *“judgmental,”* and dealt with it because it is something that all people must be aware off and confront with, not only in the others, but foremost in themselves. His teaching is simple and straightforward. We all must stop being judgmental of others and look at ourselves first, to evaluate our own lives. *“For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you.”* When I hear people searching for new solutions, for new ways of dealing with the issues at hand, whatever this might be, I respect their rights to hold such views even if I disagree with them, especially if my views are different, but I also want them to respect my views as equally worthy of consideration. There are always two sides to every coin. What, however, really annoys me in our, modern reality is that people are critical of others without being able to present any viable, constructive solutions and all they can up to is to criticize the other side just to score the political point. The criticism just for the sake of criticism never accomplishes anything, and is always wrong.

4. We live in *“the sick day and age”* of the so-called *“political correctness,”* where we are to be tolerant and to accept others as they are, at the face value. As I see it, the tolerance and the acceptance are very good qualities, and God wants us to be tolerant and accepting other people, after all Jesus proved this by accepted sinners in His entire life. For instance, while crucified, He embraced the thief, in His life He dined with the tax collectors, the *“scum of the society,”* He ministered to the adulteress at the well of Jacob, He forgave the prostitute caught in the act of adultery, He even allowed a woman, by some presumed to be a prostitute as well, to wash His feet, something unheard of in the Jewish culture. Acceptance and tolerance are indeed important qualities, but also note that Jesus did not accept the lifestyle of any of these people. He accepted them as those who needed help, and He famously said, when confronted by the Pharisees: *“it is the sick who need a physician.”*

5. Talking about refraining from judging others He was talking about not allowing ourselves to be condemnatory, denouncing others because they are different for any reason, and especially not when so often we see ourselves as very *“self-righteous.”* Unfortunately, many Christians today, tend to be exactly that. I believe that the key verse to understand this passage is found in the verse 3: *“why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own?”* We all have tendencies to be critical of others and this is indeed a serious problem, especially in the Church, where so often the: *“holier than Thou”* attitude prevails. Jesus warns that those who do this will themselves be judged. We must remember that only God is the ultimate judge because only He has all the facts and only He can see the situation as it really is, and what it really is. We may and we should evaluate certain things, issues, situations, etc., but we must also remember that our evaluation is not as reliable as God’s. We do not see the heart of another person, but God does. Besides can we live up to the standards we set for others? These, after all, are the standards we will be judged by when the time comes. Jesus’ message is clear: *“evaluate your own life and judge yourself first.”*

6. Only when we honestly look at ourselves, may we be able to resist the temptation of criticizing others.

We must evaluate our own life. We must look at our own flaws and examine our own weaknesses and to deal with them first. We need to look at our own heart for only then may we be able not so easily to be tempted to judge others. It does not mean we are to accept whatever the others may say just for the sake of appeasement. No, we are to discern what is right and what is wrong, and the Scriptures are given us for this reason. We may not however to see ourselves as *“the righteous,”* while others are sinners. Do you remember the prostitute brought before Jesus? *They brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and said to Him: "the law Moses commanded us to stone such.” What do you say about her?" Jesus said to them: "Let him who is without sin throw the first stone." Then Jesus said: "go and do not sin again."* Jesus did not accept her lifestyle, but He saw her heart and the great need she had. Do our politicians, our journalists, our entertainers, even our religious leaders take Jesus’ words to heart? All I heard these last few months was hatred, lies and condemnation of others, without any *“self-evaluation,”* without any willingness to listen to one another.

7. Unless we are willing to deal with ourselves and our own condition, we are but the hypocrites. If we as the Church really want to help others, we must first accept that we too are sinners and we must *“remove the log from our eye, before criticizing the sliver in the eye of others.”* This is extremely important because only when we truly see ourselves for who we are, we may realize that we too need mercy, not judgment and that only Jesus Christ Himself offers such mercy. If God were to judge us for who we are we would be condemned, therefore, we must treat others as we would like to be treated. Jesus wants us to love one another, to seek what is the best for one another. He calls us to build up one another rather than condemn one another. The *“spirit of criticism,”* especially the unwarranted one, destroys others, ruins the relationships, and discourages people. This kind of attitude has no place in the Church. It has no place in the life of a Christian. What is better, to be criticized by others or to be encouraged? Jesus told us to treat others the same way, as we would like to be treated. Evaluate others – yes! Be critical and judgmental of others? No! *“Give it to Caesar what’s Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.”* Only God is the true and the ultimate Judge, and we need to realize that one day we all will stand in His presence and will be judged. How will we fare then?