

Why we should not judge our neighbour (Abba Dorotheos)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



Sunday's Gospel of the Good Samaritan has as its core message 'Love your neighbour as you love yourself'. But the story is a reply to a specific question and obviously doesn't exhaust all facets of the issue. For example, in this particular case, the 'neighbourly' thing to do next would be to guarantee the safety of the road so that future travellers would not fall victims to robbers. In today's terms, it's clear that we must look after refugees and provide them with shelter, food, medical facilities and an environment acceptable to them, but also that we should be working towards making their countries of origin self-sufficient and safe, to the extent that the refugees can return and prosper there (Naturally, this does not mean 'nation building', whereby we bomb them into agreeing to live the way we think is best for them). This extract from Abba Dorotheos presents another aspect of loving one's neighbour. It is in the form of a talk to the brotherhood of his monastery. WJL.



Those who wish to be saved pay no attention at all to the failings of their neighbour, but always look to their own weaknesses and, in this way, make progress. Like the monk who saw his brother sinning and said: 'How terrible. Him today, me tomorrow'. Do you see how secure this makes him? Do you see how he's prepared his soul? How he immediately found a way to avoid criticizing his brother? By saying 'Me tomorrow', he brought himself up short and became concerned about the possibility that he might find himself in the same situation. And so he avoided criticizing his brother. But, as though this weren't enough, he considered himself beneath his brother who had sinned and said: 'At least he repented of his sin, but I don't repent at all, I don't know if I'll reach that stage, I don't know whether I'll have the strength to do so'.

Do you see how this soul has been illumined by God? Not only did he avoid criticizing his neighbour, but he considered himself beneath him. But miserable people like us are quick to condemn, are revolted and appalled if we hear or suspect anything. And the worst thing of all is that we're not content with bringing harm upon ourselves, but we come across another brother and immediately say: 'This and that happened'. So we harm him as well, by putting sins into his heart. We don't fear him [the Prophet Habakkuk] who said: 'Woe to him that gives his neighbour the thick lees of wine to drink, and intoxicates him'. We're doing the work of the devil and aren't concerned. What else does the devil do other than upset us and harm us? So we're complicit in the perdition of ourselves and of our

neighbour as well. Because if you do harm to another soul, you're cooperating with and assisting the demons. In the same way, if you benefit a soul you're working with the angels.

Why would this happen to us if not because we lack love? If we had love, we wouldn't care about the failings of our neighbour. This is what Saint Peter tells us: 'Love covers a multitude of sins' [I Peter, 4, 8] And again [Saint Paul] 'Love does not rejoice in iniquity, but covers all things' [I Cor. 13, 5-6]. So, as I've said, if we had love, it would cover every fault, as is the case with the saints when they see all our failings. Or are the saints blind and don't see our sins? Is there anybody who hates sin more than the saints do? But they don't hate the sinner, they don't condemn, they aren't revolted. They suffer with us, they give us their advice, they comfort us and treat us as a part of their body that's ailing. They do all they can to save us...

So let us also be loving and merciful towards our neighbour, so that we don't descend into wretched slander, condemnation and defamation of others. Let's help each other as we would the parts of our own bodies. Are there people who, if they had a sore on their hand, their leg or any other part of their body, would be disgusted and would cut off the offending organ rather than put on a plaster, make the sign of the cross over it, put holy water on it, pray, ask the saints for their intercession? To put it simply, they wouldn't dismiss this part of their body, they wouldn't be disgusted by it, they wouldn't be put off by the smell. They'd do whatever it took to cure it. In the same way, we should suffer with others, we should see how this applies to us, with the help of those who are stronger than us and should do whatever we can to help ourselves and others. As Saint Paul says, we're members of each other (Rom. 12, 5)... The more you're united to your neighbour, more you're united to God.

Let me give you an example from the Fathers. Let's suppose that there's a circle inscribed on the earth, like a wheel*, with a hub at its centre. The wheel is the whole of the earth and the hub is God. The spokes, which start from the circumference and go to the hub, are the paths, the ways of life open to us. The further the saints proceed towards the hub, in their desire to come closer to God, by the same token the closer they also come to others. And the closer they come to each other, the closer they come to God. And vice versa. The further people move away from God and go back towards the circumference, the more they also distance themselves from each other. Likewise, the further they distance themselves from each other, the more they're removed from God.

God grant that we'll pay attention to what's in our interest and that we'll do it. Because the greater the attention and interest we show in applying what we've heard, the more He will enlighten us and teach us His will.

****Abba Dorotheos actually uses the word 'compass' here, but the analogy is more difficult to translate.***