

De Sales

SPIRITUALITY CENTER

"Reasoned, not rash: judgment"



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Have you ever made a snap judgment about someone else? Have you ever gone with a first impression about someone else and never moved beyond it? Have you ever spent a great deal of time imagining or even obsessing about someone else's motives? Have you ever found yourself presuming the worst about someone else?

If you have done one or more, you may have been guilty of rash judgment.

St. Francis de Sales has a pretty low tolerance for the practice of judging others rashly. In his Introduction to the Devout Life, he wrote: "How offensive to God is rash judgment. It is a kind of spiritual jaundice that causes all things to appear evil to the eyes of those people infected with it. Rash judgment begets uneasiness, contempt of neighbor, pride, self-satisfaction and many other extremely bad effects."

Why do we judge others rashly? Francis believed that "people who have drunk in pride, envy, ambition and hatred think that everything they see is evil and reprehensible."

Francis suggests that there are a number of interior qualities that tempt us to judge others rashly: a naturally sour or negative personality; arrogant or presumptuous

attitudes; trying to make oneself feel better at the expense of others; a desire to flatter and excuse oneself by finding someone else who appears worse; an attempt to make oneself seem more intelligent or 'together'; strong personal dislike; jealousy; fear; ambition, and "other mental weaknesses."

What is the ultimate goal of rash judgment? "To draw a conclusion from an action in order to condemn the other person."

"God's judgment is so different from ours," wrote St. Jane de Chantal. God never judges rashly. God's judgments are fair, clear, patient and long-suffering. God judges not with an eye to condemn, but with the hope of calling us back, of making us whole, of setting us right, of offering us the power of reconciliation, of extending to us the promise of eternal life and love.

God's judgments are not rooted in suspicion or speculation. God's judgments are rooted in the truth.

What steps can we take to cure ourselves of the disease of rash judgment? "Whoever wants to be cured must apply remedies not to the eyes or intellect but to the affections. Drink as deeply as you can of the sacred wine of charity," wrote Francis de Sales. "Charity will set you free from

the perverse moods that cause you to make such tortured judgments. Since charity is fearful of meeting evil, charity never looks for evil."

He continued: "Imagine yourself the seller when you are buying; imagine yourself the buyer when you are selling. In this way you will sell and buy according to justice."

Does this mean we should be blind to the actual evil, sins or imperfections that may exist in others? No. "It is permissible to doubt or suspect in the strict sense and as far as proof and arguments compel us to do so."

The key is to address any actual or perceived issues or conflicts as simply and quickly as possible.

And then, move on—learn and let go—rather than brood over or harbor them in our hearts.

To be like God—to live like Jesus—to love like the Spirit—we must judge one another in ways that are reasonable and righteous: base judgment on fact, not fiction; in sensitivity, not suspicion; on behavior, not bias; in faith, not fear.

Francis de Sales wrote: "If your affections are kind, your judgments will be likewise." What do our judgments of others' hearts say about our own?