

Over the years, I've tried to teach children that there is a big difference between tattling and telling. Tattling or snitching is the intentional act of trying to get your brother or sister in trouble or make yourself look good. Telling is reporting to another person in order to help someone who is struggling or being hurt.

One of the most interesting and often neglected storylines in our Gospel parable centers on those who witnessed this unbelievable act of wickedness. Some might call them snitches or tattletales. But think about it. What if these “fellow servants” had kept their mouths shut? Looked the other way? Minded their own business?

I can't help but ponder, often with great sadness, how many priests and bishops fell under this same spell of silence.

A few years ago, a certain famous Catholic posed the following rhetorical question: “Who am I to judge?” It was a question heard 'round the world.

Although the remark was taken out of context, the world didn't care. “Yes!” a jubilant but jaded world acclaimed. “The mean, hateful, judgmental Church has been tamed. All is well. Everything is just opinion. No one has the right to judge me!”

Judgment is considered to be an uncompassionate behavior in our society; judging is wrong — except when it's not. Apparently, it's wrong to judge someone's sexual behavior, for example, but perfectly legitimate to judge someone for their political views. We judge all the time. How could anyone hire a babysitter without judging?

Passing judgment on the world around us is a perfectly natural aspect of being human. What Jesus teaches us today is that when we are called to make judgments, we must do so with the intent of helping our brother or sister escape sin and the destruction it creates, not to elevate ourselves.

We don't have as many conversations, as we used to, about moral obligations: to serve justice, to be ethical, to act compassionately. So many of us have been seduced and conditioned by our culture which chastises and punishes those who make judgments from a counter-cultural set of values, opinions, and standards.

And yet those 'fellow servants' who were 'deeply disturbed,' "went to their master and reported the whole affair." They did this, because they were concerned, not only for the community, but for the common good as well.

Sinful and disordered behavior is harmful to everyone. Just think if we made no judgments about depriving others of their right to private property, or to speak their mind, or to protect their family.

Not only does permissiveness bring suffering to the sinner and others affected by the sin, but it also gives scandal, creates complacency, undermines justice, and may even incite unhealthy responses such as vengeance or hateful anger.

None of us should feel justified by our silence in the face of sin or wrongdoing. We must judge between good and evil; we cannot shirk from our duties to correct error and to rebuke sin in others, as well as being open ourselves to the same—there is nothing of greater value than the eternal destiny of one’s soul.