

SEPTEMBER 6 FATHER PETER JAE CHOI

Black turtleneck, blue jeans and New Balance sneakers! Yes I am describing the signature look of Steve Jobs. He wore them each and every day! In fact he had a closet full of the same cloths. When he was asked on an interview why he wore same clothes every single day when he could afford to buy expensive cloths, his answer was that it takes time and energy to make decisions, so by removing distraction like deciding what to wear each day, he would have more time and energy for the really important stuff, like focusing on his vision, such as product development and growing his business. The secret behind his success was being laser focused on what is really important, and not wasting time doing what was unimportant or unnecessary. While this being the case, is there also a winning formula when it comes to faith? Are there things we should avoid so we can be laser focused on growing in our faith and holiness?

We find the answer in our First Reading and the Gospel: to refrain from making judgement and compare with others. Each of us are created as unique individuals with unique sets of talents and we all have a unique history. Even Though we may feel like we may be in a position to judge others, only God can be the judge, because only God knows the full story. Only God knows our history, what we've been through and what we are capable of. God knows the traumas we've suffered, the pain we feel inside, what makes us feel insecure and afraid, and what conditions us to react the way we do, often hurting ourselves and others in the process. God does not ask us to be judge over others, because we are simply not qualified to be the judge, and it wouldn't be fair either to us or to others.

In the Gospel, however, the Scribes and Pharisees began comparing themselves with Jesus and His disciples, and felt that they were superior to them, since Jesus and His disciples seemed to be lacking in the practice of prayer and fasting. The problem with comparing ourselves with others is that we fall into the trap of sin either way, of feeling superior or inferior. If we think we are better than others we commit the sin of pride, and if we feel inferior to others, than we

may feel jealous or envious of others, or might even feel depressed, which would not only be sinful but also unhealthy. So rather than being distracted with comparing and judging others, we need to focus on what is really important, that is what God thinks of us. The only time I think a comparison is not only justified but also encouraged is with our own self. We need to compare ourselves with yesterday, last week, a year before, to see if we are growing, if we are improving, or if we are perpetuating the same mistake over and over again.

Blessed Carlos Acutis, who will likely be canonized next year, will become a first millennial saint. Even at a young age he understood that what was most important in the spiritual battle is battling with the self. He said, “What does it matter if you can win a thousand battles if you cannot win against your own corrupt passions? It doesn't matter. The real battle is with ourselves!” God calls us to holiness by overcoming our own struggles with our sins.

The Pharisees and the Sadducees observed the law faithfully but their focus was not on God, but on themselves. The reason for observing the law was not to honour God but to win the praise of others. Therefore, instead of recognizing and praising them, Jesus saw right through them and exposed their hypocrisy. God knows what's in our hearts, what motivates us, but God also sees what we need and He provides us with the love we need. What we need in order for us to progress in our relationship with God is love! To grow in our relationship we need to purify our motive and live for God's Kingdom!

Once upon a time there was a pilgrim who was walking through a city and came across a construction of a beautiful building. Curious, he approached one of the workers and asked, “what are you building?” He replied, “I don't really know what I am building, I am doing this back breaking work in this scorching heat. I can't wait until I finish today to go home and rest. So if you will excuse me I need to get back to work.” Walking a little bit further he decided to ask another person, “Excuse me. Can you tell me what you're building here?” The man replied, “I don't really know what I am building, but I work here because I need to work to pay the bills. You know how it is.” Just as he was about to carry on with his journey, another worker came over with a big smile and

explained, “We are building a great Cathedral Church for God’s glory!” The three workers were working on the same project, but for different reasons. One was out of necessity, the second driven by a sense of duty, and the third for God’s glory. What sets the saints apart from the rest of us is their motivation, the reason why they do what they do. So, are you at the level of the saint? Do you know what you need to do to get to that level? Let us be intentional about growing in our faith and holiness by choosing to remove all spiritual distractions and keep focusing on God and our spiritual battle plan.