

When someone criticizes you, something inside you dies. It could be a profoundly important thing that the person is criticizing for you, or it could be the most trivial thing in the world. It hurts you, nonetheless.

Yes, none of us is perfect and a criticism should be made if it can make us or make things better, but that critique is still painful in that forces us to realize that we are not perfect.

And I'm sure I'm not alone in this, but I can get 1,001 affirmations- and I do, and I thank you from the bottom of my heart for that- and I get one criticism and that criticism is what I focus on and which gets all my attention.

But even Jesus was criticized- like any human being, He was subject to what people thought about Him and the specter of failure was always there. The first part of today's Gospel reading is the last section of the ninth chapter of Matthew's Gospel and all throughout that chapter, Jesus is criticized, and not about petty things either. He was accused of blasphemy; He was accused of being an immoral person; He was accused of being far from God- and that's an ironic statement if there ever was one; He was accused of consorting with demons; He was ridiculed by those who doubted that He could actually do what He claimed He could do; even the blind man He healed second-guessed what He could do.

And I'm sure all that hurt Him. It must have hurt his disciples as well, including the hotheads James and John- the sons of thunder- whom you remember wanted to rain down fire upon a city that refused to welcome Jesus.

But Jesus was focused- laser-focused to use an anachronism- he was focused on His mission, on what He was sent here to earth to do, and He wasn't going to allow any condemnation or insults or petty comments get in the way of that. Jesus knew that what He was

trying to do- to bring about God's Kingdom here on earth through healing and reconciliation and bringing hope to a people very much in need of hope- that all these good things were going to be threatening to those who were in power and did not want their position and their status and their privilege challenged in any way. So of course these persons were going to try to make Jesus appear to be unfaithful to the Law and therefore to God and dangerous and crazy, but what did He care? He was entrusted by His Father with a job to do, and He was going to do it, no matter what it would cost Him. Because it was all worth it, after all, and He knew that His Father would give Him the grace and the strength and the courage that He needed time after time, exactly as He does with us.

I've shared with you before that I failed my driver's test four times, but I kept at it because I was told by my Capuchin formators that I would have to be able to drive if I wanted to be a priest and be able to serve God's people. And I wanted to be a priest more than anything, so I put up with the disappointments and the frustrations and even the snarky comments of some of my brothers, and I kept my eyes on the prize and I begged God for the grace and the strength and the courage I needed. And I finally got there and how happy I am for that.

Yes, I'm still a nervous driver- they should put out a warning to clear the roads when I get behind the wheel- but I do it because I love God and I love God's people, and I don't let even my own criticisms of myself keep me away from what I know God wants me to do.

So let nothing stop you from doing what you know you need to do- never let the opposition you encounter or the misunderstandings or even the immensity or complexity of the job in front of you get you down. Those things ultimately don't matter because God is the master of all that is and so He will have the last word. *"Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. . ."*