

Examining myself in light of my pet peeves

When I'm in a hurry, I always seem to break a shoelace tying my shoes. Won't buy that brand of shoelace again.

When I'm late for an appointment, I always seem to make myself even later by trying a shortcut. Why are these darn streets so poorly marked?

When I'm in a strange city, it always seems that other people drive like maniacs. Why don't they drive like I do?

When I'm frustrated with myself, I seem to be most apt to say a cross word to someone else. What's wrong with these people?

Certain circumstances draw out the worst in me, though my initial reaction is to point the blame elsewhere. That's usually the way it works with pet peeves.

Knee-jerk judgments

Pet peeves raise my ire, get my dander up, make me clench my fists or throw up my hands in frustration. They are those annoying imperfections I observe in the world around me which in my estimation just shouldn't be there. Often my pet peeves have to do with things that keep happening, or people who keep behaving the same way, even though I have already expressed my disagreement.

My pet peeves can even cause me to give an impromptu lecture on what I learned in school. An early morning pet peeve can ruin a whole day.

Have my share of pet peeves, but in the scheme of things they are unimportant and probably useless to those around me. They are knee-jerk judgments I render on people and the world based on perspectives to which I tenaciously, though often uncritically, cling.

My pet peeves can cause me to expend lots of emotional energy, often in spurts. I have learned from observing how I let them affect me that when I insist on everyone else being reasonable as I define "reasonable," I become the most unreasonable of all.

There is a difference between having righteous anger over something that is clearly wrong, immoral, false or harmful, and having a pet peeve.

'You condemn yourself'

For example, we have a responsibility to defend our faith when it is being taught falsely; we have a duty to defend



ARCHBISHOP
J. PETER
SARTAIN

someone whose rights are being denied; it can be an act of justice and charity to confront another about a serious fault that has affected us or others.

If we never act on righteous anger, we give the impression that anything goes. Acting on pet peeves, however, creates its own set of problems.

Pet peeves aren't problematic because they're totally wrong, for they might well contain some measure of validity. They are problematic because, for the most part, they are about me.

I take something potentially important and reduce its importance to how it affects me. Pet peeves seem to be about how the world "out there" should change, but for the most part they're about how I should change.

It helps to take a look at pet peeves and ask why I clutch them so tightly. Many times I discover the reason I had let myself be bothered by them was that there was something going on in my life (I was hurried, late, worried, hurt) which needed attention, and I let my frustration with myself color my attitude.

To my embarrassment I notice that I am often guilty of the very subject of my pet peeve. I hear the voice of St. Paul: "You are without excuse, every one of you who passes judgment. For by the standard by which you judge another you condemn yourself, since you, the judge, do the very same things" (Rom 2:1).

The breaking point

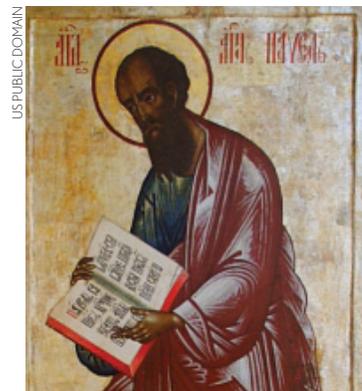
Most of us would be more peace-filled throughout the day — as would those around us — if, when our pet peeves grab hold of us, we drop them, then and there, with a laugh. "There I go again."

When it comes to morality, Jesus says clearly that wrong is wrong and evil is evil. But when it comes to judgment, I should begin with myself.

"Stop judging, that you may not be judged. For as you judge, so will you be judged, and the measure with which you measure will be measured out to

DO YOU HAVE AN INTENTION FOR ARCHBISHOP SARTAIN'S PRAYER LIST?

You may send it to him at Archbishop Sartain's Prayer List, Archdiocese of Seattle, 710 Ninth Ave., Seattle, WA 98104.



St. Paul

you. Why do you notice the splinter in your brother's eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye?" (Mt 7:1-5)

"The measure with which you measure will be measured out to you." I am reminded of a retreat director who once said, "Life gives us change

back in the currency with which we do business." He meant that the reactions we elicit from others often spring from the way we have approached them in the first place.

Have I scowled or been demanding or sarcastic? Have I packed so many expectations into an hour that I have rushed around frantically, stretching to the breaking point not only my shoelaces but also my patience? Is it possible that my pet peeves would not have been ruffled had I behaved more considerately in the first place, or had I been on time and not in a hurry?

Paul encouraged the Romans (14:13), "Then let us no longer judge one another, but rather resolve never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother."

Perhaps a good antidote to the power pet peeves have over us is to take a good look at ourselves, then pave a smooth road for those around us with kindness, patience, forgiveness and humility.