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Here's a story I learned from a book written by the theologian, John Shea. It has to do with Mohatma Gandhi.

A woman brought her granddaughter to Gandhi and commanded, "My granddaughter eats too much sugar. Tell her to stop."

Gandhi said, "Bring her back to me next week."

The grandmother and granddaughter returned the next week. But Gandhi again put them off, saying the same thing, "Bring her back to me next week." This happened three times.

Finally, Gandhi said to the granddaughter, "You should not eat so much sugar. It is not good for you."

The grandmother was thrown for a loss. She said, "We waited four weeks for this simple remark?"

"Ah!" Gandhi sighed. "It took me that long to stop eating too much sugar myself."

It's true that one of the spiritual works of mercy is to "admonish the sinner." That's tricky business. It easily and frequently backfires and makes matters worse. The only way to truly help our neighbor,

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according to John Shea anyway, is to tell the story of our own struggle.

That's the only way to avoid the sin of hypocrisy, and if we fail to do that, nothing what we say will matter that much because the hypocrisy will undermine any efforts to be of help to the other person. It seems that hypocrisy was the sin Jesus got worked up about the most quickly. Do a word search of the Gospels. His attitude about hypocrisy will be easy to find.

Nobody wants to be known as a hypocrite, but it is hard to adopt the mental attitude that keeps hypocrisy at bay. There are starting points, though, and plenty of good examples.

One starting point is the saying, "There, but for the grace of God go I." People who use this saying recognize that the trouble someone else has gotten into is something they could easily have gotten into, too. But the grace of God has somehow kept them from it.

Maybe you have had the experience that has occurred to me on multiple occasions. I like to think of myself as a good driver. And my driving record would really not contain any evidence to the contrary. But I know that there have been times when I've had a close call, and when I could only say to myself, "That could have

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turned out really badly.”

It didn't, and for that I am grateful. But it does keep me from tooting my horn about how good a driver I am because I was there when the bad thing almost happened.

We need to keep examples like that in mind to keep ourselves from becoming prideful and thinking too well of ourselves. The complete record is never as good as the record we've cherry picked to present to others.

St. Francis was convinced that he was the worst sinner of all. Even after he had received the 5 wounds of Christ and even after everyone else looked at him as a perfect example of Christian discipleship, he sense of sin did not wane. It wasn't a pious put-on, either. He really believed it.

Honesty would dictate that we keep in view the whole record of our lives, including the faults and failing and intransigence of the parts of our lives that are still resistance to grace and change.

There's probably more there than just a speck of dust. If we really want to be helpful, we have to put in the interior work of true conversion. Otherwise, we're

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just spouting off.