

OCTOBER 4 2024 FATHER HENK VAN MEIJEL

Pretty strong words. But it's all tied in with our gospel reading, with the first readings, and it's about God's omnipotence, the all-knowing God.

And there is a battle going on between also an all-knowing God, an all-loving God who also has given us free will. Free will to do whatever we want, and there's that battle going on, and it can go on until our last breath or probably beyond.

I am not, I don't know what happens after we die, what happens in purgatory, but it is presumed that battle can keep going.

And so, in the gospel reading, Jesus says these very strong words for these cities that they did not repent, and it is about coming to understand and appreciate the all-knowing God.

In the first reading of Job, we have Job coming out of the cloud and talking to Job, "Were you there when this happened and that happened and so on?"

And of course, we have Psalm 139, which is a beautiful psalm of the omnipotence of God, an all-knowing God. I really invite you if you have some time today to spend some time with Psalm 139.

You can run away wherever you want to, but God knows where you are and God knows what you are up to. There's that battle between all of us, and we can see especially in society how that battle is played out where so many people deny God and want to have control of their own lives, even until the last breath.

I was shocked even in my own extended family. Not too long ago, a person passed away. I won't mention their name, but passed away and, uh, there's no funeral, no nothing. No acknowledgment of there being a God in life. No, we just get cremated and I guess we throw the ashes somewhere in the wind.

There's a battle going on. The same with MAID, the assisted suicide, shall we call it, where people want to have control until the last breath and cannot give their suffering, their life to God.

It is about control, but when we can give up control, great things can happen. And, of course, today we celebrate St. Francis of Assisi. One of those who really had to give their life to God.

Where did his conversion happen? In jail. He had to be at the lowest possible where he could be. He was a very, uh, spoiled little child. He was born with a, shall we say, golden spoon in his mouth, and he could do whatever he wanted to.

His parents were very wealthy; his dad was a merchant, a very wealthy merchant. And so, he had to come to his senses, especially in jail, where he had no control over his life and where he realized that the ultimate control belongs to God, and that God has control over everything.

And that's where that great conversion happened—right up to giving everything away. He was even giving his father's possessions away, and we have that great, famous scene in court, where his dad took him to court, and where he literally took his clothes off and said, "Here, Dad. These are yours, too," and he got somewhere a robe of a beggar, which is today, the Franciscan habit.

Of course, Franciscans today, their habits are nice, beautiful, washed, and cleaned, but not in Francis' time. But totally giving his life to God and discovering how God wants to use him.

Early on, he found himself in a local church, St. Damiano Church, very close by, which was really in ruins. Actually, there's a great parallel between the time of St. Francis in the 13th century and today's time where so many people have walked away and do whatever pleases them.

And so he's in the church and does that famous thing about that he's sitting in this church, it's half ruins, falling apart. When an icon of the crucified Jesus literally says to him, "Francis, Francis! Go and repair My church, which, as you see, is falling into ruins."

He thought that he had to rebuild literally the physical church he was sitting in, and he started doing that until he realized, I guess, with more revelations, that he was called to repair the greater Church, our Church, where so many people had fallen away, and he went on the road preaching and so on.

And of course, attracted all kinds of followers and some very strange followers like Brother Juniper and so on, but a great desire to gift their life to God and to let God lead it.

To live on handouts, not to acquire any wealth, I should say, but to live from hand to mouth and preach the Word of God. To be a sign for others, and it grew by leaps and bounds. It was from God.

We sure could use another St. Francis today in our modern world. Hopefully, God will send one. Of course, we had Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who was such a great sign.

But St. Francis, who also is the first documented one, received a stigmata—the wounds of Jesus on His hands and feet and in His side about two years before His actual death. And so, there is good stuff to pray with. Also, St. Francis, who really saw creation as a gift from God. He saw God everywhere in creation.

And actually, today, it's also World Animal Day. Not by coincidence, I'm sure, but how St. Francis cared for creation, for animals. In many churches, at least when I was at a parish, I used to invite people on

October 4 to bring their pets to bless them and to recognize that everything is part of God—the great omnipotence of God.

And he would talk about Brother Sun and Sister Moon, Brother Wind, and so on. Everything was a sister or brother to him. He was a great caretaker for nature and, of course, for today's environmental movement. St. Francis was a great sign.

Although many environmental movements, too, have steered off from faith, trying to control things themselves instead of giving it to God and letting God lead it. And it's good stuff to pray with and to sit with the life of St. Francis. How St. Francis answered that call of God leads us to reflect on our own lives.

Am I answering the call of God right now? Is there something I should change in my own life today? Amen.