

SEPTEMBER 20 FATHER HENK VAN MEIJEL

This little, short reading really touches on something that has been in the church for 2,000 years: most of the work is done behind the scenes by women. It clearly mentions some women who supported Jesus and who were also healed by Him. Yet, if you look at our church today, most of the work is still done by women. The men may get the attention, but women usually do the work, and nothing is different here at Manresa Retreat Centre either.

We have some excellent staff—some who are paid, some who are volunteers—who keep me, so to speak, in line. Some people would say I need a lot of keeping in line, but we'll leave that where it is. It is important to acknowledge how many women pour out their love from their hearts for Jesus and express that through their work at the church.

This reading is again about believing. In the first reading of St. Paul to the Corinthians, St. Paul addresses the issue of Jesus not being resurrected. Some members of the community were obviously grumbling, saying, "Yeah, we are Christians; we have embraced the faith, but about this resurrection, I'm not sure. I don't really believe that." St. Paul addresses their doubts beautifully. He says, "If that were not so, then we're all fools. We have all been fooled, and I'm the biggest fool. If Jesus had not been resurrected, I would also be a great big fool." It would also mean that about 2.6 billion people on this planet are wrong—hard to believe!

But the thing is, it's always about that personal experience. How God keeps calling us back. We can learn the teachings, do Bible study, say prayers or rosaries, and whatever else we do, but it always comes down to that personal experience: Has God touched my heart? As a spiritual director, I often see these conversions. Just the other day, I was with a young mother who said, "I grew up Catholic, and as soon as I was a teenager, I thought, 'I don't need this; it's meaningless. I'm going to focus on my career. I'm going to do what I want to do. I embrace the

culture of the 'me' culture, and this is going to be my happiness,'" until she conceived her first child.

She realized, "I better set an example for this child because the child is going to question, just like I questioned." She went on a journey to rediscover her faith. In this journey, God can wait. God touched her heart deeply, leading to a real conversion. Now she can explain the faith to her children and pass that faith on to the next generation. This scenario is so common.

This is a prime example of a mother, but I often see similar stories in the AA movement. Many are touched through their addictions; God reaches out and says, "Come. You're broken. It's good that you're broken. Now come and follow me. I have the answers; I will give you the courage to move forward." This encapsulates our faith.

Today, on the memorial of the Korean martyrs, we remember those who gave their lives for their faith gladly. We discuss Andrew Kim and his companions, including Paul Chong Hasang, who died before Andrew Kim. Paul embraced the faith, and it's interesting to note that in Korea, the faith existed before missionaries arrived. Diplomatic and scholarly exchanges between Korea and China brought the translated Bible back, leading to a Catholic community that gently grew without a priest.

Andrew Kim's parents were martyred for their faith, and he himself studied in Macau and the Philippines before being ordained in Shanghai, after which he returned to Korea. Unfortunately, he was martyred at age 25.

If Andrew Kim is wrong, then I'm wrong too. One of his companions, Paul Chong Hasang, was arrested before his ordination, despite being in his early 40s. When captured and imprisoned, he wrote a defense of the faith to the judge. The judge agreed with him but said, "The King forbids this religion. It is your duty to renounce it." Hasang replied, "I've

told you that I'm a Christian and will be one until my death," whereupon they executed him.

These examples illustrate how saints are deeply touched by the Spirit of God. When touched by this Spirit, everything else becomes insignificant. Any honor or recognition fades; it's all about God—about a God who continues to call generation after generation back to faith.

Yes, we hear many voices saying that the faith is declining, that fewer people are attending church. However, the faith will persist in one way or another, simply because the crucified God keeps calling new generations back to the faith. Amen.