

SEPTEMBER 7 FATHER HENK VAN MEIJEL

We can really look at this Gospel reading and ridicule it, saying how silly it is that the disciples cannot take some food or grain on the Sabbath. Of course, there were many of those laws that, in our eyes, seem ridiculous. But on the other hand, we have swung completely to the opposite way in our 24/7 society. There's no Sunday left.

As a matter of fact, a few weeks ago, I was asked to attend a business meeting on a Sunday, and I absolutely refused. We have six days to do business; Sunday is the Lord's Day. But we have really lost the meaning of Sunday in many ways. This decline probably started around 40 years ago when Sunday shopping became popular. Families have to work, which diminishes family life in our 24/7 society.

Likewise, while the internet can be good, we often find ourselves connected 24/7. Even on Sundays, we remain plugged in, especially when our jobs depend on the internet and email. It never seems to stop. It would be nice if more limits could be imposed so that we could reclaim the Sabbath and restore the significance of Sunday.

In the first reading from Corinthians, Saint Paul is giving the Corinthians a bit of a talking-to. He is admonishing them because, although they have become Christians, they walk around with an air of superiority, saying things like, "Look, I'm a little bit better than you are." He points out their tendency to boast, making remarks such as, "See what I have that you don't."

Paul admonishes them, saying, "Hey, wait a minute. Everything is a gift of God. Know that everything comes from God," and they need to realize that, in the grand scheme of things, they are literally nothing. It's so easy to boast. Personally, I often find myself in casual conversations where people tell me about all the things they've done in their lives. It feels like boasting.

"I went on this trip, I went far away..." Maybe it was to East Africa, or "I had a trip to Thailand," or something similar. It's as though they are subtly saying, "I'm a little bit better than you are. See what I can afford that you cannot." However, God is the great equalizer. We are all equal before God, and coming to God means realizing that, in the grand scheme of things, we are absolutely nothing.

We are dust. Everything is a gift from God. Our intellect is a gift from God. From our intellect, everything becomes a gift. If I can study, it's a gift. If I'm really good with my hands, that, too, is a gift. Some people are extremely gifted with their hands. For example, a carpenter who can make beautiful furniture, which I would not have a clue how to do, has a different gift.

We all have different gifts, and it's important that we come together. As I stand here in front of the camera, I am reminded that I am the centerpiece of this TV Mass right now. Many people come to me and say, "Oh, Henk, you're wonderful!" and I'm getting so sick of it. People often forget that it takes a lot of individuals to produce this program. There are about ten people working right now to make me look good, each contributing their own God-given gifts.

No one person is better than another, and this includes the housekeeper who keeps the toilets clean. We are all the same before God, and often, those with the deepest faith are usually those who have the least. When you have less, you know you are nothing. However, in our Western world, we have so many resources and often forget that, in God, we are nothing and that we are all equal.

The 12-step movement, which includes Alcoholics Anonymous and other support groups for addiction, begins with the admission, "I cannot fix my life." This principle also applies to us in our wealthy Western society. Acknowledging "I am nothing in God" is crucial.

The more we realize this, the more we are open to God; then God can work with us. However, as long as we think we are better or have all the gifts, we may still believe we can fix our own lives. But that's impossible. It is vital to understand that we are nothing in God and that we are equal.

Again, in the 12-step movement, Step One is: "I cannot fix my life." Step Two is: "I need a higher power. I need God." This need for God is universal—whether you are battling addiction or living with wealth. We must recognize that there is a higher power in our lives and take time to reflect on our shortcomings or character defects. From there, we can grow in God, acknowledging that we are weak and that only God can provide us with healing.

Saint Paul beautifully captures this message in his letter to the Corinthians. He reminds them that everything starts with God and that, ultimately, we are nothing without Him. Amen.