

OCTOBER 31 2024 FATHER HENK VAN MEIJEL

A bit of a confusing Gospel reading today because Jesus is reacting to what Herod is saying. Herod sends messengers with a threat to kill Jesus. From a psychological perspective, we might say, "Herod is simply a power-hungry ruler, like any dictator, eliminating threats to stay in power." But beyond that, it's about which spirit Herod is listening to. He desires power and control, and the evil one plays on that desire.

In the first reading from St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians, Paul addresses this by saying, "Put on the armor of God." Our battle isn't against enemies of flesh and blood but is, in fact, a spiritual one. We often forget that we are engaged in a spiritual battle. Addressing this requires daily prayer and self-reflection, looking inward to examine our dispositions.

This reminds me of a story about six women who went out for dinner. When they arrived at a busy restaurant, they had to wait 45 minutes, and the tension led to frustration. One made a harsh remark, others joined in, and soon they were blaming each other, causing tension and hurting their friendships. What began as minor irritation escalated quickly. As Christians, we need to bring such things into our prayer lives and remain in touch with the Holy Spirit. The devil exploits our weaknesses, so we need to know ourselves, including our "character defects."

At retreats, like those here at Manresa, I remind people that if someone is getting on their nerves, there's usually more going on. The devil wants to distract us from God, making it easy to focus on others' shortcomings. This happens in families, workplaces, and friendships. It's essential to

recognize that there's often more happening spiritually than meets the eye. We hope to listen to the Holy Spirit and be agents of peace.

Our Psalm today, originally written for those going into battle, also applies to our spiritual lives. We are in a constant battle and need the Holy Spirit to guide us. Reflecting daily on our behavior helps us to recognize God's presence within us and to handle frustrations better. Even as a priest, I find myself challenged by others; it's human nature, especially in community life.

In relationships, especially in family and marriage, understanding each other's unique needs and differences is essential. This requires silence, reflection, and openness to the Holy Spirit's guidance in our hearts. Apologizing when we're wrong is crucial, too. Once a negative word escapes, it's hard to take back. Jesus reminds us that it's not what goes into our mouths but what comes from our hearts that matters.

Today's Gospel calls us to pray over these thoughts. This aligns with today's Jesuit calendar because we celebrate Alphonsus Rodriguez. He was a simple Jesuit brother who died in 1617, exemplifying humility. Despite hardships—failed education, widowhood, and losing his children—he dedicated himself to God, becoming an example of humility. He eventually joined the Society of Jesus, not as a priest but as a religious brother, serving as a doorkeeper for 46 years at a Jesuit college in Majorca.

For Alphonsus, every visitor was Christ, and his humility influenced many, including St. Peter Claver, who became a missionary in South America. Claver ministered to thousands of enslaved people brought to Cartagena, Colombia, in horrendous conditions, providing them with care and necessities.

We can learn so much from people like Alphonsus Rodriguez, who embraced simplicity and allowed God's love to transform their hearts. May we, too, seek that humility and openness to let God guide us. Amen.