

NOVEMBER 13 2024 FATHER HENK VAN MEIJEL

This is an interesting reading, I find, because it gives us time to pray with; it's not logic.

There are ten Samaritans—I was going to say "seminarians" but... (chuckling)... Samaritans. They're cleansed. And actually, they're doing what the Lord prescribed. I presume that the nine other ones were Jews. Jesus says, "Go and go to the priest and show yourself." That is the law—to go and show yourself—and then you are accepted again in your community. You're no longer in exile; you're accepted back in the community.

This Samaritan, however, is not a Jew, so this law did not apply to him. But he recognizes, literally, that Jesus is God, and he goes to Jesus and, of course, worships Him. I think this is where the others failed—they did not recognize that this was God. They said, "Hey, you're clean," and off they went to their priest to show what had happened.

This, I think, shows the difference between simply following all the rules and having faith, seeing God in our daily lives. This is true faith—in faith, we see how God is working in our daily lives. The healing of these lepers is a very profound example of how God presented Himself in their lives.

But the more we grow in God, the more we relate to Psalm 23. Psalm 23 is one of my favorites, and most people know this psalm. I often give it as a penance for confession, so if you come to penance, you might get Psalm 23 from me. It's about recognizing that God is first, a God who leads us. The more our eyes open to God, the more we recognize how God is at work and how He leads us with both the rod and the staff—the staff for comfort, guiding us in the direction we must go, and the rod to keep us in line.

The rod represents the lessons we learn through our own suffering, the way we learn from our mistakes, and how we keep focused on the path. And then, there is God, leading us to those green pastures. Psalm 23 is such a beautiful psalm to pray with and to sit with, reflecting on the mystery of God, the mystery of how God works in our lives.

As we internalize this, we don't need the teachings of the first reading from Paul's letter to Titus as much. Titus, along with 1 and 2 Timothy, are pastoral letters by St. Paul on how to live a good life. As Paul emphasizes in this letter to Titus, he calls us to be polite and courteous, calm, self-collected, and so on—qualities that are crucial in modern life too.

We live in a society that some describe as post-Christian, where most people are like the nine lepers who were healed in the gospel—acknowledging that "there is a God somewhere," but without an intimate knowledge of Him. As we grow in God, we naturally become better people and examples for others. We should not look down on those who are struggling to live out their faith, because they are on a journey, just as I am on my journey.

I can look back at my life too. I could judge others by asking, "Why does this person do this or that?" But I remind myself of how I was when I was young, the mistakes I made, and how God has led me, sometimes using His rod to guide me back to the right path. This is our life journey. The more we grow in God, the more we realize how God gives us life and courage—the courage to remain calm even if we're persecuted.

As I was praying on this, I thought of how the Church celebrates many saints daily. I use the Laudate app on my phone, which gives me around 20 or 30 saints each day.

Today, we celebrate Blessed Carl Lampert, a German priest who was guillotined—not shot, but guillotined—in 1944 for speaking out about his faith. He was a man of faith, who saw the wrongs in the world and spoke out, paying the ultimate price. This, of course, reminds us that in our own society, while we're not persecuted in the same way, there is often an expectation to keep faith private—to believe what you believe and leave it at that.

So, we may feel shy in public, hesitant to make the sign of the cross, wondering, "What will other people think?" In the world of today's blessed, however, they were literally oppressed and couldn't even make the sign of the cross in public without giving themselves away.

Today we also remember Blessed Pavel Djidjov, a seminarian priest in Bulgaria under communism, who spoke out and faced a bullet. Blessed Vincent Bossilkov, a bishop also in Bulgaria, was shot. And Blessed Josaphat Chichkov, another priest, was shot in 1952. These were people who embraced a deep faith in Christ, and through that faith, found the courage to face their society and stand strong.