

APRIL 5 2025 FATHER HENK VAN MEIJEL

You can imagine the scene. It's the Festival of Booths—the fall festival and a commemoration of the Exodus. There's a big crowd, and Jesus is teaching in the temple. He's teaching with authority, but He's not dressed like someone with authority.

The Pharisees and teachers would have worn specific garments so everyone knew they held religious authority. But Jesus would've been dressed like everyone else. His authority wasn't in how He looked—it was in His words. His teaching caught the people's attention. They were listening. It got their ear.

Naturally, the leadership had to get Him out of the way.

In many ways, this echoes the first reading from Jeremiah—the prophet sent by God to deliver a message of conversion. But Jeremiah realizes quickly that the message is not accepted. As we know, he was eventually imprisoned in a pit. They didn't dare kill him, but they wanted to silence him. The king offered some protection, but still—Jeremiah had to go. He brought an uncomfortable message, and that's often the fate of the prophets.

Prophets see things from the outside. They see our blind spots. And nothing has changed today. In our Western, consumeristic culture, we often move from day to day unaware. But we still have prophets in our lives.

So often, we can ask ourselves, “Who's the one irritating me?” Is it my spouse? A family member? A coworker?

Because often, the people who irritate us the most are the ones who act like prophets in our lives. They bring us uncomfortable truths. It's not uncommon when I meet with people for spiritual direction, they'll say,

“My wife (or my husband) tells me the same thing you’re telling me.”  
I’ll tell them—save your money or donation for spiritual direction—just listen to your spouse!

In marriages especially, our spouses know us better than we know ourselves. They see our blind spots. That’s why it’s so important to listen to those people who challenge us—not in a hurtful way, but in a meaningful way. Yes, there are people who get under our skin for no good reason, but the ones who call out something we don’t want to hear—those are often the prophets in our lives.

In my own religious community, I have people who point out my blind spots. And it’s a gift. It’s good to have people like that, so we can grow, correct ourselves, and stay on the path.

Today we remember Saint Vincent Ferrer, a Dominican preacher who lived from 1350 to 1419. He traveled all over Western Europe preaching, and he was very involved in the papal schism from 1378 to 1417—when there was one pope in Avignon and another in Rome. There was great division in the Church, and Vincent tried to bring peace and reason. He wasn’t always liked—because he too was that uncomfortable voice. But it was the voice the Church needed.

So during this Lenten season, take some time to ask yourself: Who are the prophets in my life? Who knows me best? Who gives me a message I don’t like to hear?

Listen to them. Learn from them. Let it guide you back to the right path.

Lent is a time to look inward, to open our hearts, and to let the discomfort of truth help us grow. Learn from those who challenge you. Learn from those who love you enough to speak honestly.

And grow in Christ. Amen.