

MARCH 13, 2025 FATHER HENK VAN MEIJEL

Today's readings are very much about prayer. And in the first reading we have Esther, Queen Esther, praying intercessory prayer, "God, help me, and intercede for my people." We have, in the book of Esther, we have Haman, who wants to kill all the Jewish people, he got the okay from the king... And since she's Jewish, and she finds out, and she's praying an intercessory prayer. But not all prayers, of course, are answered the way we would like.

On the Sermon of the Mount, and I think a lot of people misread this passage, of the Sermon on the Mount, where, "Ask, and it will be given to you." "Knock, and the door will be opened." Many people see God as a Santa Claus. I asked, and it has to be given to me. I pray that my children will go to church on Sunday, and they still don't. I've been praying for, what, five years, and they still don't. Or, I'm praying that my spouse, that my husband changes. But it's not that simple.

But, it's also a disposition of heart, how we ask for things. It's not that we always ask for the wrong things, but in the scheme of things, we do not really know what to ask for, I think. And so, of course, the golden rule, of course, is in everything do to others as you would have done to you. Always, you would not treat anyone else different than you want to be treated.

In my own prayer life, I learned over time not to ask for things. Not to ask for things. My prayer-- I've got plenty of issues in my own life too-- My prayer always is, "God, I don't understand, but may only good come from it." May only good come from it. May it be used for your kingdom. And that changes everything. It at least changes things for me. Instead of wanting to have concrete results from our prayers, it often doesn't

happen. God is there, and God does change little things, but it does not mean that we're going to get our own way.

And, of course, often, we pray to avoid suffering. Well, suffering is part of our spiritual journey. To be human means we will be suffering. And if you haven't suffered yet, don't worry, it will come. It will come by itself. And so, we have to learn to pray-- to endure suffering. And often, Romans 3-5 always is close to my heart. Because it says, and Paul writes, "We boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God, and not only that, but we also boast in our suffering, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope never disappoints."

This is that living in hope, that God will be there. We are people of hope. And if we are people of hope, there will be a future for us. But as soon as we lose hope, then everything falls apart, of course, and we become disillusioned. And we start to worry. But the world is a messy place, but we live in hope. And to have that endurance. And it makes me think of one in our TV audience, a person who has a son incarcerated overseas, waiting for the son to come home. And to have that endurance of many years of waiting, that the son can come home, to the US. Waiting that the son is being released, and can serve his time in US prison, a little closer to home.

But, as she writes to me, anyway, it's the endurance, God has given her the endurance, to stick it out, and continue to stick it out, hoping that everything will be okay. And this is the same in our families. We are hoping that everything will be okay. Today we also remember the anniversary of Pope Francis, who was elected on this day in 2013. And right now, he's of course 88 years old, and continues to lead us. He is a

person of hope, always trying to bring some good in the world. And he's a great example for each one of us, how to live in hope.

He cannot change the world. Of course not. But, to live a simple life, and to build community. And, as we know, if you follow anything Pope Francis does, he is committed to inter-religious dialogue. Breaking down barriers. And we can learn of that in our own families. Breaking down barriers. He shows compassion to the LGBT community. And trying to be compassionate. Not saying, "Hey, you people! You should smarten up." No! He shows compassion, and likes inclusion. Always a critic of capitalism and consumerism. As we, especially in our Western world, are so stuck in our consumer goods, and of course, the power of major corporations, who just become bigger and bigger, and some individuals make enormous amounts of money, and but it's about sharing with others.

He cannot fix the world. But he prays, of course he prays, that the world will be a better place. But he just goes one day at a time, and is there for so many of others. And how can he do that? Well, he had a life, a very difficult life, too. He was, as many know, he survived the Dirty War in Argentina, where was the Jesuit provincial. A very difficult period in his life. A very difficult period, where he had to make some very difficult decisions. And I'm sure that he, he would have internalized that Romans 5. To endure, and to live in hope, that God will bring goodness out of it. And God continues to bring goodness out of it, as he-- as Pope Francis touches many hearts. And we can learn so much from it, in our own lives, in our own families, in our own relationships. Just to gently work at it every day, and live in hope. Amen.