

DECEMBER 9 2025 FATHER HENK VAN MEIJEL

Such a short reading yet so powerful.

That God—Jesus used an analogy of the shepherd, and the shepherd who looks for the lost sheep. And a God who looks for the lost sheep. Always—God is always calling. Even if someone is away from the Church or strays away from the Church, a God who keeps calling, and, of course, a God who celebrates if one of those sheep come back. And it's interesting stuff.

And I see it also with—with the work we do here at Manresa with the AA community, where so many have walked away from God, got stuck in their addictions, in alcohol and drugs and so on, and then they find their way back to God. A God who is always looking and trying to find them back.

Interestingly, yesterday, I met a person who came to visit me—I worked with him 45 years ago when I was a fresh immigrant in Canada and we worked for a landscape company. Who went away from the Church too, and his wife died of cancer. And as she died of cancer, she was lapsed Catholic, and she—and she tried to find back her faith. And he was not a Catholic at all, but someone suggested that you should watch the Daily TV Mass. And he came to thank me—I didn't do anything. To thank me for finding his faith back. Someone who found their faith back.

And it's so exhilarating when we see how God works in the mystery of life. How God works through our own suffering and keeps calling, "Come home, come home." And this is the mystery of God, of course. But also a God who works through salvation history. A God who always tries to bring good out of bad.

And the first Book of Isaiah, I just love the poetry, the text is beautiful. But it's called the Book of Consolation. Also, some people call it Deutero-Isaiah. But it's written when the Jewish community was in exile. They were in Babylon, and it is—it is a book of hope. Yes, there is hope. And the exile is only temporarily. “You will come up out of exile and all will be well.” And it's beautiful. So many of us also on the personal level, live in exile, and it's so good when God calls. A God who keeps, like I said, working through salvation history.

And one line that really stuck out for me in this first reading is surely the people are grass, the grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of God will stand forever. The word of God will stand forever, from generation to generation. And a God who keeps calling and keeps calling and showing us the way.

And today we celebrate Juan Diego, who lived in the 16th century and where Our Lady of Guadalupe appeared to. Again, Our Lady showing the way to Christ, to her son through salvation history. Juan Diego, who was just a simple man, he was an Aztec, a native. And Our Lady appears to him in—in 1531, during the month of December. Several apparitions. And it's interesting how God called so many through this simple man, Juan Diego, and the great miracle, of course, in the fourth apparition, that when—when he was—Our Lady asked him to go up the hill, and basically on a rocky—rocky ground, to pluck flowers, in December when there should be no flowers on that hill. And even on ground which is really not suitable to grow flowers. And we have the beautiful story that Our Lady asked him to put the flowers in his tilma, and—and to show it to the Bishop, the Bishop who was asking for a miracle. And he opens the tilma, the flowers fell out, and we have the image of Our Lady of Guadalupe on this tilma, which is still visible at the pilgrimage—pilgrimage—pilgrimage site in Mexico City.

But through this simple person, this—and yet powerful, He—God again called so many lost sheep. Also, a God who is a God of everyone. No one is excluded. And it was very—and the great miracle also is to show the white Europeans who were conquering the Aztecs to show that everyone is a daughter and son of God. Everyone. And God doesn't want anyone left behind.

There is consolation for all of us, a God who keeps looking for those who stray away, and not to be afraid of it. A God who works through our suffering history, but also through our family's—family history. So many families struggle with generational hurt, from one generation to the next. And yet God is working through that. Jesus keeps calling, and we see these incredible, incredible conversions of people who come back to God. And not to be afraid.

And the big celebration, of course, is much more—God will celebrate much more, and I celebrate much more over one conversion than a person who always has lived a good life in Christ, because is already—he or she is already on the right road. But the one who has converted and saw the light, so to speak, and comes to God, there is great—there is a great need for celebration. To celebrate that, that one lost sheep came back, just as the gospel reading is talking about.

Amen.