

JANUARY 8, 2026 FATHER HENK VAN MEIJEL

"All spoke well of him and were amazed at his gracious words."

And we just go a little bit further, and they say, "Is this not the son of Joseph? "Is this not the son of Joseph, the son of the carpenter, "who really has no education? "How can this be?"

And, of course, Jesus has a few strong words to say, Jesus, he really proclaims as he comes to Nazareth that he is the Son of God.

I would not be surprised, if you or I were in the synagogue at that time, we might have said, also, you know, "Who does he think he is?"

But Jesus was proclaiming the word throughout Galilee after he came out of the desert, out of the 40 days in the desert. He was accepted everywhere except at his home town, where everyone knew him personally and intimately.

And this is also for us. So often, we might be accepted in all kinds of places, except our own family, who gives us a hard time. And it's something in human nature, which is just as in our families. Our families, our family members, are usually our strongest critics. And it's not all bad, but of course, it also can go sour and where there's too much criticism and family relationships break down.

In the first letter of St. John, there obviously were also plenty of problems in the Johannine community, who wrote this letter, this first letter of John. It's probably anonymously written, not by John. But there must have been problems in the community. And it starts right off by saying, "If you love God, you've got to love also your brother and sister, you've got to love those around us," and those are very difficult words to deal with, to love everyone for who they are.

And St. Raymond de Peñafort, which we celebrate today, he actually is very much known for compiling the canon law. Well, of course, it has changed in 800 years quite a bit, but he was the first one, under Pope Gregory IX, who missioned him to compile the canon law. There were all kinds of different books and pamphlets and literature about how we should operate as a church, what the rules were for proper communication and proper behavior in a community.

It's just in human nature that we need to be guided by something, by a structure, and he's very much was missioned to do that. Actually, he became very old. He became 100 years of age, lived from 1175 to 1275-- an incredible old age for those days, where most people probably died in their mid-40s. But he obviously did a lot of work. He was born in an influential family, and had a doctorate in civil and canon law, and actually entered the Dominican order at age 47, very late, at an age where most people are on the dying bed. But obviously, he's done much good work.

But we need-- beside canon law, which guides us, but we cannot get stuck in all the little rules, and this is something which we really is one of the big burdens in our lives. It's so easy to want to go by all the little rules and to live by all the little rules. But the rules should be in our heart. They should be planted in our heart.

And we just have to see in civic litigation how the courts and lawyers and judges make a good living about interpreting the rules and how often justice becomes injustice. But we, as people of God, we should not need all the little rules and we should love those around us as for who they are, and this is not easy.

When I see people for spiritual direction or counselling who are struggling with family members or people who have hurt them, to try to make sense of it and the goal is always to love. Loving, of course, is working towards forgiveness, but also working towards understanding where the other person is at, understanding what the other person-- what their struggles are in life, where they came from, what their cultural heritage is, what their family history is.

And the more we can do that, the more we can place ourselves in someone else's shoes, the more we can also love them for who they are. But, of course, it's not at all that easy, and it's very important to have boundaries, and especially if someone has been violated. So many people I encounter have been sexually or verbally or whatever, physically violated and have deep scars, to come to the understanding where the violator came from and to come to some understanding of what has happened.

But that does not mean we're going to be all huggy and kissy and everything is going to be beautiful. Of course not. We have to draw boundaries, and it's so important to have those boundaries in our lives. I can love people for where they are, for where they are at. I'm not going to go to battle at them. But if someone is toxic, I have to stay away from that person. I have to draw boundaries and not get hurt again.

It is so important in our lives that we evaluate that on a regular basis, almost daily. That's why we have the Ignatian exam, we're talking about taking daily inventory. What is happening in our lives and how are we coming along? How can we learn from our relationships, and how can we draw healthy boundaries to some people we do not like to engage with, we have to engage with, but how can I do that in a healthy way?

And it's not easy stuff. But we just work at it day by day. And the important thing is that we are people of love and not people of hate. An old saying that sometimes people say, "Just forget it, get over it, and carry on with life," that doesn't work. And especially if there's a lot of pain and hurt, we cannot just carry on with life. To healing is a journey. It takes time to forgive.

To love God starts by wanting to be people of healing and to be people of community. Amen.