

FEBRUARY 25, 2026 FATHER HENK VAN MEIJEL

Today's reading jumps us right into the middle of this Lenten season, of this unbelief. Lenten is a time of conversion. And in this Gospel reading, Jesus is getting a little bit fed up with the people, and he says, the only sign you will get is that of Jonah. Jonah, and I will get on to it, we heard the first reading, of Jonah in Nineveh.

But Jesus, just before this, Jesus says to the crowds: "Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it." And just before that, he has been casting out demons, and doing all kinds of signs and miracles, and the people still want signs. And that's obviously a sign of unbelief. And Lent is a time of conversion.

My own conversion, which took also about 25 years ago. As a nominal Catholic, as a cradle Catholic. I always went to church like a good boy, and but did I have any idea of what the readings of the day were? Could I remember what the homily was? Nothing. I just went to Mass, and you know I'm comfortable in my own thing, and like so many of us, we cultural Catholics, and we just do our thing, and everything is good, without giving it a second thought.

But when God hits us, then there's a time of conversion. We have to be shaken up. And sometimes in dramatic ways. Now, it's no uncommon for me to experience that many more people are like how I used to be. Just go to Mass, and maybe some of you who are listening right now, maybe you just put on the TV, and you listen to the Mass, but there's no preparation before Mass. To do the readings of the day, which are so easily accessible, especially on the computer, or the phone. But to look at the readings of the day first, and to pray with it. And so often we do

not, we just go in and we sit there, and we just listen. And we miss so much. And it's so common.

And so, Lent is a time of conversion. To be shaken up. It's kind of interesting today that we have the reading of Jonah in there. Of course Jesus in the Gospel says, "The only sign I will give is that of Jonah." And Jonah, who is going through Nineveh, and he has to give the message of doom. That you are doomed. That Nineveh is going to be destroyed. And the people of Nineveh, enemies of the Jewish people, they repent. They go in sackclothes and ashes, even the donkeys do, it's kind of a funny story. Actually, I really like the account of Jonah.

But it takes a shock to have our eyes opened up. And it's so uncommon to see that. It takes quite a bit. And Jonah, too, his eyes were closed. He was called initially, and we have the story we all know about Jonah and the whale. And being spit out by the whale on the beach because he was trying to run away from God. We cannot run away from God. A God who's always looking for us, even when we try to run away. God is still calling.

And, like of course in my own life, God called me too, and said, "Hey, smarten up." But I had to be shocked into something. Into my dark days, that's where my eyes really opened up. And this is such a common occurrence. I see it often, as I often have motioned, at Manresa we do a lot of work with the 12 Step community. The people, as they come in recovery, that they completely change, and they come back to the faith. They come back to the faith, and rediscover the great gift of our faith. How God was there with them all the way along. God, just calling them, but they would not listen. Just like the people in today's Gospel, the audience of Jesus. Many of them were not listening, and they're just lax.

And so, when we look at the body of the saints, there are so many conversions. So many examples from us to learn from. For instance, Camillus de Lellis, who became a soldier at age 13. Just a rambunctious young man, who could not be disciplined by his mother, and he went off fighting. And he had to get injured and dismissed of the army, before something happened. And he's the founder of the Camillians. A great sinner, who killed, who did whatever, and he— there is a conversion, he was shocked, and out of being lax. And he had to come to God.

Another saint I really like is John. John of God. John of God, who died in 1550, also a saint who actually, he was a shepherd for a farmer, the farmer offered his daughter in marriage, and so he could inherit the farm, and he said, No, that doesn't entertain me, it's not exciting for me. So he went the army and fought for Charles V, until he was dismissed, almost killed himself, and there's a whole story. A couple of years of coming to himself. And a great conversion. And he's also the founder of the Brothers of Hospitallers. Again, just like Saint Camillus, he completely turned around his life, and starting to care for those who were sick. Those who were suffering.

And of course, as a Jesuit, our founder of the Society of Jesus, Saint Ignatius of Loyola. A proud young man who only thought about women, and glory, and all of the worldly possessions, and a cannonball had to hit him in the leg before he smartened up. That he was laying on bed for 10 months, and there was a conversion. And of course we have this Ignatian spiritual exercises out of that. That he learned to listen to God. That he learned to listen to God. That really God gave him new life. He and the sermon of spirits, he discovered how the devil is very much at work in our lives. How the devil is calling so many even today, to do— to lead selfish lives, and so on, and away from God.

And so we are all called back in this Lenten season to conversion. And it's good stuff to pray with. Where am I at? Where am I on my journey with God in this Lenten season? Are things a little bit lax? Or is there time for conversion?

Amen.