

MARCH 12, 2026 FATHER HENK VAN MEIJEL

This Lenten season, Lenten is very much a time to look inward, of course, and to take stock, and how also today's readings really deal with our own human weakness and we are humans. And as the last line from the gospel reading, it says, Jesus says, "Whoever is not with Me is against Me and whoever does not gather with Me scatters." And it sounds so simple, but it's not, because in our human nature, we so easily can also work against God, even if we go to church every Sunday and we try to be good Christians.

It is amazing how that works and it's deep in our human nature, this kind of stuff. Jeremiah, in the first reading, very much deals with this too and he's talking about imminent doom because, he's, basically because people are blind. Blind to God's voice and the psalm today, their response was, "If today, you hear God's voice, Harden not your heart." But and so many of us hear God's voice even if we are, like I said, even if we are good Christians and we go to church all the time and we still can be deaf to God's voice.

It's really interesting stuff and, but we have to fall basically on hard times often before there can be any conversion. And it's interesting as I was praying with this, I had to think of my own life. I'm a very late vocation, but even in my teenage years, I had a call to the priesthood and I know that looking back, but I couldn't go anywhere with it because in the '50s, '60s, '70s, when the economy was booming, there was less need to go to church and people would walk away from church because it was good. Life is good. You have money, you have possession, you get sick, you go to the doctor, and oh, yeah, God is there somewhere, too, and it's really become and it's easy then to become also negative about the Church.

I remember, as a kid, they, one of my family members we'd go around always said, "The Church is like a bank. All they want is money." And it's really easy to get in that negative mood about being negative about the Church. Well, Jesus is very much working in the Church and building the Church, and calling people all the time and it's good stuff to pray with, there's something in our human nature that always draws us back to be lax.

And actually I used to have a small business for 25 years, but there's a general rule, they called it three generation rule for family business. The first generation works hard, is innovative, and they build a business. And the second generation kind of takes over the business, it's running very well, and they might expand it a little bit. The third generation, they're born with the golden spoon in their mouth and they become very lax and it all goes downhill and they go out of business.

And this is also when we look in our faith, how people walk away from the Church, and we see it right here under our eyes in the Western World how so often parents come to me and they say, "I've done everything I could, yet, my children, they do not go to church. But I showed them the way and they did." But the children are comfortable and we live in a secular world, a world who says you can do everything you want and whatever you want and you can be whatever you want to be. Which is one of the big lies, of course.

But to be open to God's call. God continues to call every day and it's interesting to witness myself as we at Manresa are privileged also to work with Seminarians. How sometimes Seminarians, they come from homes, Mommy and Daddy might have been divorced twice already, they live in a great big mansion and they have walked away from the faith. And yet, all of a sudden, one of the children says, "But there's

more.” There's much more than all this wealth and three whole days a year going to some destination which we can brag about and, but there's much more.

And so they enter seminary and, of course, the family doesn't understand because their hearts have been hardened. Even sometimes I come across that a seminarian enters while their parents go to church every Sunday and they will do anything to stop them from going to seminary. “You're throwing away your life.” And this is something we really have to look at, but God keeps calling and so, this Lenten season is a good time to look inward.

Which way am I going? Is the world calling me more? Am I becoming more lax in my faith? Or is my faith deepening? Am I listening to what's happening in my heart? We can say all kinds of prayers and so on, but if we do not listen in the silence of our heart, then we run into problems and it's not just overnight. It's a slippery slope and down the slope we go and we can see how over time, over the last decades really, all through this whole thing about abortion and the MAID thing, the assisted dying, has come in, because people have hardened their hearts, and dying well is about placing ourselves in God's care and giving up control of our life to God.

We are not in charge and so, it's not an easy route to come to God, but it is continuously conversion. Looking inward, where am I going? What's happening in my life? Where was God today in my life? Where was God today in my life? And it can be in our relationships, can be in people we meet, but it is a good time this time of year to gently look inward and to say we ask God in my life, am I listening to God's voice? Is my heart getting harder?