

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, January 15, 2017

The Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

This email, entitled Looking to Sunday®, focuses on one or more of the scripture readings for the coming Sunday. It prepares readers to hear God's Word at Mass and it offers a point of reflection to consider in the days leading to Sunday. Looking to Sunday is written by Father Tom Iwanowski.

RECOGNIZING THE STRANGER

During the course of a day, how many people do you see? 10, 50, 80, 100, 200 or perhaps even more.

There are the people we see as we commute to work or school – the people on the bus, in the subway, on the train, or sitting in their cars waiting for the traffic light to change. There are the people we see at our work place or on campus. There are the people we see in the mall, in the supermarket, or sitting in the waiting room at the doctor's office. There are the people we see as we walk on the street or see from our cars as we drive through town. There are people all around us, especially if we live in an urban area.

Many people pass through our field of vision, but at the end of the day we would be hard pressed to describe even a few of them. We would certainly notice a relative or friend but we rarely pay attention to the strangers who cross our path.

In this Sunday's Gospel (John 1:29-34), John the Baptist describes how Jesus went from being a stranger, someone he did not notice, to being the one he recognized as the object of his preaching and ministry.

Jesus was among the crowd that was listening to John and being baptized by him in the Jordan River. But at first, John did not know him. Twice in the Gospel reading John admits, "I did not know him."

It is only when John saw "the Spirit come down like a dove from heaven and remain upon him" that John recognized the stranger as the "Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world," as the one who would "baptize with the Holy Spirit," as the one he would testify as being "the Son of God."

It was the Spirit of God that blessed John with the vision to see and recognize Jesus. The Spirit also does this for us. For John, the Spirit of God acted in a dramatic moment at the Jordan; for us, the Spirit tends to act in a more gentle and subtle manner.

That process began at our baptism when the Spirit of God came upon us and began to dwell within us. Over the years that Spirit of God has helped us to recognize the presence of Jesus in our lives and to grow in our relationship with him.

The Spirit of God has given us the vision to see Jesus in the Bread and Wine of the Eucharist and in the hand of the priest raised in absolution. The Spirit of God has given us the ears to hear the voice of Jesus in the proclamation of the scriptures and in the preaching of the Church. The Spirit of God has helped us to recognize the supportive and comforting presence of Jesus in the loving members of the Church.

For those not touched by the Spirit of God, Jesus is just another unrecognized stranger. But to those the Spirit of God has touched, Jesus is Savior, Brother, and Friend, the one who makes all the difference in a person's understanding and living of life.

Like John the Baptist, we know who Jesus is. He is the Lamb of God and the Son of God. Thanks to the Spirit of God, Jesus is not just another stranger.

© 2017 Rev. Thomas B. Iwanowski