

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, January 19, 2014

This email, entitled Looking to Sunday®, focuses on the Gospel Reading 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.

BEHOLD

“Be nice to the kids at school.” “Respect other people's property.” “Pay attention to the teacher.”

When parents give such instructions to their children, they expect those instructions to be carried out not just the day they are given but continually. For example, when a parent tells a child to be nice to his or her fellow students, the parent expects the child to treat others with kindness not only for one school day, but every day.

In this Sunday's Gospel (John 1:29-34), when John the Baptist sees Jesus coming toward him he says, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” He gives that instruction to those who were with him when he saw Jesus. That same directive is given to us as we hear that Gospel reading.

It is a command that we are expected to follow not just at the moment we hear it, but every day. We are reminded of that continuing expectation each time Mass is celebrated. Just before the distribution of Holy Communion, the priest says, “Behold, the Lamb of God. Behold him who takes away the sins of the world.” He gives us an emphatic version of what John commanded.

To behold a person means more than just to look at someone, to see someone with our eyes. The word “behold” implies recognizing, appreciating, comprehending, discerning someone or something of significance or greatness. We do not behold our local letter carrier, but we do behold a winner of the Nobel Prize. We do not behold a McDonald's restaurant, but we do behold the pyramids of Egypt.

John the Baptist tells us to “behold” Jesus. He tells us not to just look at Jesus, but to appreciate and understand him as the one who “takes away sin” and brings us into a personal relationship with God. John announces Jesus as pre-existing before all creation, as the one imbued with the Spirit of God, and most remarkable of all, John says of Jesus, “Now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God.”

Jesus is far more significant than anyone who ever walked this earth. Jesus is the wondrous divine power that sustains the universe, present among his creatures in flesh and blood. Jesus is the one who alone satisfies the hungers and hopes of the human heart. Jesus is the teacher whose message reveals the meaning and purpose of human existence.

We can only realize who Jesus truly is if we “behold” him each day, if we make the effort to understand him and to have a relationship with him. Otherwise, Jesus remains an abstract, distant figure, just another moral philosopher among many others.

“Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” That is John’s instruction for us today, and every day. “Behold, the Lamb of God.”

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