

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, January 21, 2018

The Third 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.

A SURPRISING RESPONSE

Imagine if someone you just met at a party said, "Marry me!"

Or if the person who happened to be sitting next to you at a concert turned to you and said, "Be my best friend."

Or if a stranger you met as you arrived at work told you, "Quit your job. Come work for me."

You would be shocked by any such proposals. You would certainly not do what was asked and you would most likely get far away from a person making any such request.

However, in this Sunday's Gospel (Mark 1:14-20), four people were suddenly asked to do something just as surprising, and they agreed!

We are told that Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee. There he saw two fishermen, Simon and Andrew, hard at work. He told those two brothers, "Come after me, and I will make you fishers of men."

Amazingly they did what Jesus asked. Without questioning what would be involved, Simon and Andrew left their boat, their nets, and their homes and followed the man who invited them to change their lives.

As Jesus continued his walk along the shore, he saw another set of brothers, James and John. They were busy mending their fishing nets. Jesus told them what he had told Simon and Andrew. Just as astonishingly, they also agreed to go with him. They left their father Zebedee with ripped fishing nets and followed after Jesus.

What would prompt practical, hardworking fishermen to abandon their jobs and their responsibilities because someone walking by said, "Follow me."

We might conclude that since Jesus was God, he could get anyone to do whatever he asked. If Jesus could walk on water, multiply loaves and fish, heal the sick, and raise the dead, he certainly could have used his divine power to have people do what he wanted.

However, we know that Jesus only invited, he never commanded. If he did, then he would have compelled all his listeners to follow his teachings.

Perhaps Simon, Andrew, James, and John responded as they did because this was not the first time they had encountered Jesus.

Perhaps they had been listening to his preaching for some time. Perhaps they had been discussing his words among themselves. Perhaps they wanted to give their lives to something more than pulling fish out of the sea.

In telling the story of the call of those four men, Mark may have dramatically condensed a more gradual process whereby Simon, Andrew, James, and John moved away from being fisherman to being disciples.

We experience such a gradual process in our own lives. We can certainly have a dramatic moment of conversion in which we radically change our understanding of life and our way of living. But most of the time that conversion, that growing in holiness, is a gradual process – one that has its steps backward as well as forward.

As we listen to the scriptures, as we receive the sacraments, as we gather as God's Church, we come into the presence of the Lord who keeps calling us to follow him a little more.

This Sunday's Gospel shows a dramatic response when Jesus says, "Follow me." But we need to remember that the point is not how quickly or gradually Simon, Andrew, James, and John may have reacted, but rather that they did respond to the Lord's invitation. And that response is something the Lord is also asking of us.

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