

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, January 24, 2016

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.

IT APPLIES TO US!

If we were looking at a magazine or a website related to health, we would read those articles dealing with issues that were of concern or interest to us. If we were trying to lose weight, we would read the articles about weight loss, exercise, and nutrition. If we were diabetic, we would look at articles dealing with ways to treat and prevent that disease.

We would most likely avoid articles that had no relationship to our personal situation. For example, a single 20-year-old male would probably skip an article dealing with childhood diseases or one centered on exercise routines for seniors with heart disease.

We tend to read what concerns us and affects our lives.

If someone who had never read the scriptures came across the Gospel passage assigned for this Sunday (Luke 1:1-4, 4:14-21), that person might not read any further. In Sunday's reading, Jesus says that he was sent and anointed "to bring glad tidings to the poor...liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free."

A person who was not poor or blind or did not feel held captive or oppressed might assume that the ministry and message of Jesus was not meant for him or her. We see proof of that today. It seems that the wealthier and more successful a person or a society becomes, the less use that person or that society has for Jesus Christ. His message is seen as irrelevant and remains "unread."

It is evident from the Gospels that Jesus did reach out to the poor, the blind, and those oppressed by religious and civil authorities or held captive by demons. In fact, the ministry of Jesus seemed to be centered on those whom the righteous, the rich, and the powerful dismissed as unworthy of their time and attention. As the Pharisees asked of Jesus, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" (Mark 2:16) Why does he bother with the "unclean?"

However, the ministry of Jesus was not confined to those with physical ailments or those who were devalued by society. Jesus came as savior of all people. As the angels sang that first Christmas, "I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people."

The message of Jesus that is found in the scriptures is one for everyone. While we may not be poor, blind, oppressed, or held captive in a literal sense, all of us have areas of our spiritual life where we fit those categories.

For example, we are spiritually poor when we fail to appreciate our value as children of God, a value so great that Jesus suffered and died for our sake.

We are spiritually blind when we do not see the action of God in our world and in our lives, when we do not see the stranger as our neighbor, and when we fail to appreciate the presence of God in word and sacrament and in his Church.

We are spiritually oppressed when we are weighed down by negative thoughts, temptations, and past guilt, and when ideas espoused by an increasingly secular society and a celebrity-obsessed media assault our Christian values.

We are held spiritually captive when sinful thoughts, actions, and addictions control us, when we are powerless to stop doing what we know will harm us and our relationship with others.

Each of us needs the liberating message of Jesus found in the Gospels and preached by the Church for we are all poor, blind, captive, and oppressed in some way. We all need to hear the message of Jesus, it applies to us all. It is not meant for someone else!

© 2016 Rev. Thomas B. Iwanowski