

# **LOOKING TO SUNDAY®**

**Sunday, January 26, 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.

## **NOW AT HAND!**

Which person in the New Testament asked, "How can this be, since I have no relations with a man?"

Who made the declaration, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God"?

Who proclaimed, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"?

The first quotation comes from Mary. It is the question she asked the angel Gabriel when he announced that she was to bear a child.

The second quotation comes from Saint Peter. It was his response when Jesus asked him who he thought Jesus was.

The last quotation does not have a single answer. "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" was said not by one person but rather by two different people in the Gospels.

One of those people was John the Baptist who spoke those words when he was preaching in the desert of Judea. (Matthew 3:2)

The other person was Jesus who, as we hear in this Sunday's Gospel (Matthew 4:12-23), proclaimed them when he began his public ministry.

Though both John and Jesus said the same words, their meanings were different.

John the Baptist used them to warn people to be prepared because the long awaited messiah, the liberator, the savior who would usher in the kingdom of God was about to make his appearance. He would *soon* be "at hand."

When Jesus proclaimed those same words, he spoke them as the one who fulfilled what John the Baptist had said. In Jesus, the kingdom of heaven was *now* at hand.

That kingdom of heaven is not a place off in the clouds or off in the future. The kingdom of heaven is "at hand" whenever people open their hearts and allow the love and power of God present in Jesus to change and transform them. People touched by the divine do not go on living the same way as they did before.

We see an example of that in Sunday's Gospel. There a personal encounter with Jesus leads Peter, Andrew, James, and John to change their lives and to follow him. Suddenly their commercial fishing business and even their human relationships become insignificant in light of their encounter with Jesus.

That divine presence of God that revealed itself in Jesus Christ as he walked the land of Judea continues to show itself in our world. It continues to be "at hand" in the proclamation of the

scriptures, in the celebration of the sacraments, and in the community life and liturgy of the Church.

To encounter it, we need to repent. We need to move away from those things, those activities, and those relationships that so fill our hearts, that so encumber our lives, that so take up our time, that so capture our imagination, that so become the object of our dreams and desires, that we take little notice of the Lord who wishes to encounter us.

“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Those words spoken by John the Baptist looked toward the future. But those same words on the lips of Jesus are about what we need to do today. We need to open ourselves to a transforming encounter with Jesus Christ. If we do, we will begin to experience the kingdom of heaven today. Remember “the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

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