

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, February 1, 2015

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.

UNCLEAN SPIRITS

If you were Jesus what would be the very first miracle you would perform as you began your public ministry? What miracle would you work to show your power and authority?

Would you change water into wine at a wedding reception?

Would you open the eyes of a person blind from birth?

Would you feed thousands of hungry people with a few loaves of bread and a couple of fish?

Would you bring a dead person back to life?

Would you walk on water?

What would you do?

This Sunday we hear Mark's account of the first miracle worked by Jesus at the start of his public ministry. It was not any of those just suggested, rather in Sunday's Gospel (Mark 1:21-28) Jesus teaches in the synagogue in Capernaum and then he frees a man from possession by an unclean spirit. Those present are astonished by the action of Jesus and remark, "What is this? A new teaching with authority. He commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him."

That first miracle, that exorcism, is the type of wondrous action of Jesus most often mentioned in the Gospel of Mark.

While we may think of such miracles as appropriate for a less sophisticated age, perhaps we should consider that there are still unclean spirits roaming our world. Unclean spirits that lessen human dignity and degrade the goodness of people created in the image and likeness of God.

There is the unclean spirit of pornography that appears on our computers, smartphones and other digital devices. An unclean spirit that distorts our understanding of human sexuality and reduces human beings, particularly women and children, to objects of pleasure to be used, exploited, bought, and sold.

There is the unclean spirit of violence that surfaces in the guise of entertainment in the media and in video games and that desensitizes us to torture, sadism, abuse, and killing.

There is the unclean spirit of greed and materialism that drives us to acquire more and more even at the cost of human relationships, family life, and our physical and spiritual well-being.

There is the unclean spirit of narcissism and self-absorption that causes us to value people only to the extent they can do something for us. Those who can do nothing beneficial are simply objects to ignore or discard.

There is the unclean spirit of cynicism and contempt that mocks religion, morality, and traditional values and replaces them with nothing that gives life direction, meaning and

purpose. Everything good becomes a joke that leaves only meaninglessness when the laughter stops.

Such unclean spirits need to be confronted with the power and authority of Jesus Christ. He is the one who can drive them out.

This power and authority of Jesus are present in the words of scripture that dispel the darkness and lies that parade as truth in our day; in the example of Jesus who shows us that true freedom and meaning are found in living for God and for others; in the Sacrament of Reconciliation that frees us from our past and allows us to begin again; in the community of the Church that supports us in our struggle against evil; in the consecrated bread and wine of the Eucharist that gives us the strength to walk the way that leads to a better life today and eternal life tomorrow.

The first miracle recorded by Mark is a miracle we need in our day, for unclean spirits are still seeking to possess the human heart!

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