

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, February 11, 2018

The Sixth 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.

SCREENING FOR SIN

What is the number one disease in the United States?

If we were asked that question, we might respond cancer, heart disease, diabetes, stroke, Alzheimer's, chronic respiratory disease, or some other serious illness. The correct answer is heart disease.

However, after reading the scriptures we might conclude that the number one disease at the time of Jesus was leprosy. It was the most feared and dreaded of diseases. It destroyed the human body slowly and painfully and its diagnosis meant banishment from the community and isolation from loved ones.

The Gospels contain three accounts of Jesus curing men of leprosy. We hear one of those accounts in this Sunday's Gospel (Mark 1:40-45).

We also have a report of Jesus curing ten men of leprosy at one time (Luke 17:11-19). Ten were cured but only one returned to give thanks to Jesus.

There is no doubt that leprosy is a horrible disease. But there can be one thing said for that disease – if you have leprosy, you know it. That disease of the skin shows itself in rashes, ulcers, deformities, and nerve damage. Leprosy cannot be missed.

That cannot be said for many other diseases. For example, a person can have cancer and not realize it until obvious symptoms appear. By then the cancer has most likely spread and may be very difficult to treat.

That is why we are urged to have annual physical examinations and health screenings such as colonoscopies, mammograms, blood tests, and body scans to detect diseases whose presence can be missed.

Examinations and screenings are also necessary when it comes to our spiritual health. There are some sins, some spiritual diseases, that we cannot miss, such as murder, robbery, and adultery. They are like leprosy, they stand out.

However, sin is not always so apparent, especially in our society where sin is often excused or mistaken for something benign.

For example, pornography, which is ever-more violent, is considered only a form of adult entertainment. Drugs, which harm the body and numb the mind, are regarded as recreational substances. Vile, false, and reputation-destroying comments on social media are no longer slanders and slurs but only opinions. The destruction of unborn life is contorted to be a form of health care. Spending hours immersed in a digital world that blinds us to our responsibilities to others and to society is judged to be harmless.

Sin exists, and it negatively affects our spiritual lives whether we recognize it or not.

The coming season of Lent is a time for prayer, penance, and acts of charity. But perhaps more than ever this Lent needs to be a time for us to look at our lives and recognize the sins that are there, especially those sins we often fail to see.

If we think we are sin free, we need to examine our lives even more closely, for St. John tells us, "If we say, 'We are without sin,' we deceive ourselves." (1 John 1:8)

Today the number one disease of the body is heart disease, at the time of the Gospels it was leprosy. But then and today the number one disease of the spirit remains the same. It is sin!

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