

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, February 12, 2017

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.

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Tuesday, February 14, is Valentine's Day, a holiday whose central symbol is the heart, a symbol of love and tenderness.

That symbol might be fittingly applied to the Gospel Reading (Matthew 5:17-37) for this Sunday before Valentine's Day. For in that Gospel passage Jesus challenges his disciples to get to the heart of the matter.

He challenges his disciples to examine the thoughts and attitudes they harbor in their hearts. For those thoughts and attitudes give rise to behavior that determines who has a place in the kingdom of heaven. As Jesus proclaimed in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the clean of heart for they shall see God." Those who will find a place in God's kingdom are those whose hearts are right with God.

Jesus gives three examples of that in Sunday's Gospel. He says that it is not enough to avoid killing. "I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment." Jesus tells us to look into our hearts. For it is the anger that we allow to take root within us that leads to ill will, verbal attacks, malicious gossip, a desire for vengeance, subtle acts of sabotage, and can even explode into physical violence.

Jesus then says that it is not enough to shun acts of adultery. "I say to you, everyone who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery with her in his heart." Once more Jesus teaches us that we need to look at what is in our hearts. Adultery does not happen spontaneously. Sexual immorality begins in the heart.

It begins when we allow a lust for sexual pleasure to blind us to our responsibilities and obligations. It grows when we view pornographic images that desensitize the human heart and portray others as objects to be desired, used, and then discarded. It takes root when we allow an increasingly godless culture that dismisses faithfulness, commitment, and moral standards to influence our decisions.

Jesus then continues by saying that is it not enough to avoid perjury, to avoid lying under oath. "I say to you, do not swear at all. Let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,' and your 'No' mean 'No.'" Jesus says that our words are to conform to what is in our hearts. We need to be people who live and speak the truth. This is not easy in a society where lies, half-truths, innuendo, gossip, and fake news reign, and where criminals caught on camera shamelessly claim they are "not guilty." We are to be people of integrity whose words match what is in our hearts.

This Sunday Jesus challenges us to look not only at our behavior, but even more importantly to examine what is going on within us. For it is what is in our hearts that ultimately determines our

words, our attitudes, and our actions. Jesus tells us to look at the inside. He tells us to get to the heart of the matter.

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