

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, February 15, 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.

ASKING THE IMPOSSIBLE

There are two seemingly impossible requests in this Sunday's Gospel (Mark 1:40-45). The first one comes from a man afflicted with leprosy. The second one comes from Jesus.

At the time of Jesus, those suffering with leprosy and other associated skin diseases were treated like those with today's Ebola virus. Because there was no cure and people feared contagion, those branded as lepers were isolated, avoided, and shunned. Yet impelled by some hope that perhaps the one who was driving out demons and healing the sick could do something for him, the leper in Sunday's Gospel dares to break the law forbidding him any interaction with the healthy.

"If you wish, you can make me clean." Anyone hearing the leper's plaintive request would have thought the man was asking the impossible. In response, Jesus breaks the taboos of his day. He touches the man, risks infection, incurs ritual impurity, and amazingly restores the man to health. Jesus heals the man and in doing so allows him to return home to his family, relatives, and friends.

Jesus frees someone from the "death sentence" of leprosy. He does what his contemporaries would have thought impossible.

Jesus then informs the man. "See that you tell no one anything." Perhaps Jesus made that request because he did not want to be known primarily as a healer but rather as a preacher and teacher. But no matter the reason, it was an impossible request. The man's relatives and friends would obviously notice his physical cure. Furthermore, how could the man keep silent about the wonderful thing Jesus had done for him.

Asking the cured man to be silent would be like asking a man who had fallen wildly in love to say nothing, or requesting a woman who had won the Mega Millions top prize to keep it to herself, or asking a teenager cured of cancer to act as if nothing had happened. Impossible! Even if such people never spoke a word, their good fortune would positively radiate from their faces.

Imagine that Jesus were to tell us what he told the man in this Sunday's Gospel, namely, to say nothing about what he has done for us. Sadly, we might have little trouble fulfilling that request since we often fail to appreciate the amazing things Jesus does for us.

In Baptism, Jesus frees us from the "leprosy" of original sin and brings us into a relationship with him. In Confirmation, he gives us his Spirit to inspire us to make wise choices in life. In the Eucharist, he unites us with himself in a "holy communion" of friendship and love. In the Sacrament of Reconciliation, he forgives our sins and allows us to move beyond our past. In the liturgy, he speaks to us through the scriptures. And through the Church, he supports and embraces us through our fellow Christians.

If we realized the amazing things Jesus Christ does for us, we would act like the man in Sunday's Gospel. We would not be able to keep silent.

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