

# **LOOKING TO SUNDAY®**

**Sunday, February 16, 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.

## **AN EXPANSIVE APPROACH**

February, March, and April are the months when Americans prepare their federal income tax returns that are due April 15. In completing those returns most of us work hard to find each item, every deduction, and any regulation in the tax code that will make the amount we have to pay Uncle Sam as small as possible. To help us do just that, there is an army of tax preparers, accountants, and attorneys standing ready to assist us for a fee.

When it comes to paying taxes we want the law to be strictly interpreted for our benefit and advantage. We look for our tax obligation to be small and our refund to be large.

In this Sunday's Gospel (Matthew 5:17-37), Jesus speaks about the law. Not laws enacted by human governments but divine laws dealing with killing, adultery, and oaths. Jesus looks at those laws not in a restrictive sense as we would the tax code, but rather in an expansive way so they apply to even more situations. He says, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill."

By his words in the Gospel Jesus fleshes out what God's law demands. We might even say Jesus does that "fleshing out" in a very literal way. By the way he lived and the way he treated others Jesus showed us how God's law was to be followed.

For Jesus the commandment not to kill meant more than just not taking life. It meant not being angry, hurtful, vindictive, or litigious. It meant not killing a person's spirit.

For Jesus the commandment not to commit adultery meant more than avoiding sexual intimacy outside of marriage. It meant not letting physical desires control our thoughts and imagination. Both husband and wife were to be faithful and committed in their marriage. A wife was to be respected and cherished by her husband and not set aside.

For Jesus the commandment not to take a false oath meant more than following through on what was vowed. It meant speaking the truth, vow or no vow. It meant being a person of honesty and integrity at all times.

Jesus criticizes the scribes and Pharisees in Sunday's Gospel because they were behaving as many of us do at tax time. They were looking to find the least that was demanded by the law. But Jesus tells us that is not the way to approach God's commandments. "I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."

When it comes to interpreting God's laws, like Jesus, we are to take an expansive approach!

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