

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, February 18, 2018

The First Sunday of Lent

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.

REPENTING & BELIEVING

We all have had the experience of hearing something and then thinking, I've heard that somewhere before.

We may have such an experience as we listen to this Sunday's Gospel (Mark 1:12-15). There Jesus proclaims, "Repent, and believe in the Gospel."

Those words sound familiar for we most likely heard them if we were in church on Ash Wednesday.

"Repent, and believe in the Gospel," are the words that are usually said as the foreheads of believers are marked with ashes from the burnt palm of last Passion Sunday.

They are also the words that Jesus addresses to us as the Gospel is proclaimed on the First Sunday of the Lent.

They are words we need to hear this Sunday, every day during Lent, and beyond.

For repenting and believing in the Gospel do not happen in a moment, nor are they actions that just happen once in a lifetime.

Repenting means turning away from selfishness, self-centeredness, greed, anger, jealousy, hatred, lust, pornography, self-indulgence, materialism, slander, gossip, violence, and from all the other sins that lessen our dignity as children of God. Such repenting does not happen in an instant, any more than any positive change in life happens in a moment.

Just as it takes continuous effort to remain healthy, to remain on a diet, or to replace a bad habit with a good one – so too with repentance.

While we might wish that simply saying, "Lord, I repent, I turn my life over to you," would transform our behavior and way of thinking in an instant, and that positive change would continue unabated, that is not the case.

The same is true when it comes to believing in the Gospel. Such belief is far more than simply professing that the Gospel accounts are God's inspired word. It is more than saying "I believe" to the dogmas of faith founded on those writings. Believing in the Gospel means having a relationship with the Lord Jesus, a relationship that guides our lives.

We need to remember that when Jesus first spoke those words, there was no written Gospel, no book for him to hold up and say, "Read this. Believe this." His words, his life, his example were the Gospel.

But like any relationship, a relationship with Jesus Christ, the living Gospel, takes continuous effort, care and attention. Yes, there may be love at first sight, but such “first-sight love” dies without care, it does not last.

As Lent begins, Jesus tells us once again, “Repent, and believe in the Gospel.” The fact that we keep hearing those words shows the Lord’s desire for us to turn from sin and to deepen our relationship with him.

“Repent, and believe in the Gospel.” Those are actions we need to take this Lent and throughout our lives.

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