

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, February 19, 2017

The Seventh 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.

MORE THAN ONE MEANING

Sometimes a word has more than one meaning. For example, consider the word, "right." It means a privilege that is granted to certain people. For example, the Constitution of the United States grants citizens the right to practice their faith.

The word "right" can also mean that something is correct. For example, a teacher might tell a student that he or she chose the right answers to the questions on the test.

But "right" can still have a further meaning. It can indicate a direction. For example, a police officer might tell a driver to make a right at the next traffic light.

Words often have more than one, fixed meaning.

That is also true with the word "love." In this Sunday's Gospel (Matthew 5:38-48), Jesus tells his disciples, "love your enemies."

But what exactly does Jesus mean when he tells us to "love" our enemies?

Are we to love our enemies in the same way we love our mother or father or our son or daughter? Are we to have similar feelings and commitments toward them as we would have to members of our immediate family?

Or perhaps, we are to love our enemies in the same way we love our husband or wife, or our boyfriend or girlfriend? Are we to have the same emotional attachment toward them as we have with a person who makes our heart beat faster and who makes us yearn for that person's embrace?

Or maybe we are to love our enemies in the same way we love a close friend? Are we to grant those who desire our destruction the same place in our hearts as those we consider our best friends?

To love an enemy in any of the ways described above would be extremely difficult. How could we love someone who despises and hates us and whom we equally dislike with the same love we show a parent, a child, a spouse, or a dear friend?

However the word "love" can have a further meaning beyond those just described. We love someone when we wish the best for that person and when we do everything in our power to make our wish for that individual a reality.

We love our enemies when we show them undeserved good will and kindness and we do our best, with God's help, to make sure that bitterness and a desire for revenge do not poison our hearts or direct our actions.

The love we are to have for our enemies is not a matter of emotion or feelings but rather it is a matter of the mind. It is a matter of deciding to wish what is good and to do what is good for a person who has no claim on our heart, a person whom we do not like.

It is important to realize that loving an enemy does not mean allowing that person to engage in destructive and evil behavior. Loving someone means directing that person to do what is good and to avoid what is bad. For example, parents do not show love for their children by allowing them the freedom to play in the middle of a busy street or to bully their classmates.

Loving our enemies means seeking the best and doing the best for them, just as God does.

And if we find it impossible to love as Jesus directs, then Jesus tells us what we are to do. He says, "Pray for those who persecute you." Such prayer will eventually lead us to go from praying for our enemies, to wishing them well, and then doing what we can to make those good wishes a reality.

Sunday's Gospel challenges us to get right what it means to love our enemies.

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