

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, February 25, 2018

The Second 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.

CONTEXT HELPS

When we begin reading a story, we usually open to the first page. We start at the beginning and as we read page after page we come to know the setting, the situation, and the characters involved. The story gradually comes to life as we turn the pages.

If we open to the middle of a book that we have never read before and start reading, we are lost. It takes us time to understand what is happening, what occurred earlier, why the characters are behaving in certain ways, and how those characters relate to one another.

The best way to understand a story is to read it from the beginning. In that way, we can see things in context.

This Sunday's Gospel Reading (Mark 9:2-12), which relates the transfiguration of Jesus, is from the middle part of Mark's Gospel.

At the moment of the transfiguration, Jesus shines with divine glory. Moses and Elijah appear with him. And a voice from the heavens declares, "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him."

We can understand the transfiguration as a moment of divine revelation, but we can get a better appreciation of that event if we know what occurred earlier. Our understanding grows when we put the event in context.

In the preceding chapter of his Gospel, Mark tells us about the first prediction that Jesus made of his coming passion and death. Mark says that Jesus "began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer greatly and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and rise after three days." (Mark 8:31)

On hearing this, Peter was so upset with Jesus that he "took him aside and began to rebuke him." A suffering Messiah was not what Peter had in mind when he professed, "You are the Messiah." (Mark 8:29)

Not only that, but after predicting his passion, Jesus spoke of the suffering that awaited his disciples. "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me." (Mark 8:34)

Obviously, Peter and the other disciples must have been confused and concerned upon hearing what Jesus was saying about himself and about their future.

So six days later, Jesus decides to take Peter, James, and John up a high mountain. There Jesus is revealed in glory as God's beloved Son and as the fulfillment of the law and prophets represented by Moses and Elijah.

In response, Peter exclaims "Rabbi, it is good that we are here!"

Perhaps Peter spoke as he did because witnessing the transfiguration reaffirmed Peter's faith in Jesus. It also helped him to realize that the path Jesus was taking conformed to the Father's will. "This is my beloved Son. Listen to him."

Peter needed that mountaintop experience.

As followers of Jesus, we also need experiences that reaffirm our faith. That is one of the reasons why we gather for Sunday Mass.

We gather around the altar, our holy mountain. Here we listen to the word of God. Here Jesus reveals himself to us not in a blinding light but in consecrated bread and wine. Here we are strengthened to take up our cross and follow Jesus.

If we truly understood and appreciated what happens at Mass, like Peter, we too would say, Lord, "it is good that we are here!"

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