

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, March 4, 2018

The Third 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.

WHAT TEMPLE?

Just because people hear what someone is saying does not mean they understand what is being said.

For example, if someone on a buffet line in the company cafeteria turns to her employer and says, "I can't put another thing on my plate," we might assume the person is saying that her plate is so filled with food that it does not have room for one more item.

However, the words, "I can't put another thing on my plate," might have nothing to do with food. If earlier in the day the employer had assigned that individual a large project with a looming deadline, the person might be telling her employer that she could not take on another project. She could not put another thing on her "plate."

The words are the same, but the meanings are different. In one case, "plate" relates to food; in the other case, it relates to a person's responsibilities.

We see the same thing in this Sunday's Gospel (John 2:13-25) when it comes to the word "temple."

In Sunday's reading we hear how Jesus comes into the temple in Jerusalem and drives out the money changers and those selling animals for sacrifice. They were making his "Father's house a marketplace."

When the Jewish leaders demand to know by what authority Jesus acts as he does, he replies, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up."

For the Jews who heard those words, they made no sense. For how could Jesus rebuild a temple in just three days that had taken 46 years to construct? Impossible.

But as John tells us Jesus "was speaking about the temple of his body." That temple would be destroyed and in three days it would be raised up.

For the Jews, the word "temple" was the building, for Jesus it was his body – same word, two different meanings.

That understanding can help us to relate Sunday's Gospel to our own lives.

We sometimes apply the reading to the institutional church with its flaws, failings and sinfulness. The church, like the temple of old, needs cleansing and renewal. Every Catholic can make a list of things that he or she believes needs changing in the church.

But if we understand the "temple" as Jesus used the word, then the reading directs our attention not so much to the church but to us.

If we honestly look at ourselves, we can see that our “temples” are in need of cleansing and renewal. All too often we allow sin, especially the sins of greed, materialism, and selfishness to infiltrate our lives.

Just consider how much more time, effort, worry, and concern we give to our finances, our jobs, and the accumulation of wealth than we do to our spiritual lives and our relationship with God.

How we understand the word “temple” will determine how we see this Sunday’s Gospel. Is it an interesting incident in the life of Jesus? Is it a critique of the church? Or is it a Lenten challenge for us to examine our lives?

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