

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, March 6, 2016

The Fourth 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.

ABSOLUTELY UNDESERVED

As Americans we believe that we should get what we deserve – what we have worked for and earned. We believe in fair play.

If we work overtime when requested, we expect to be paid for those hours and paid at a higher rate than usual.

If we achieve the highest grades possible during our four years of high school, we expect to be recognized and honored at graduation.

If we tirelessly campaign for candidates running for public office and those candidates win, we expect to be considered when it comes time to fill government positions.

We believe that we should get what we deserve. If that does not happen we get angry, upset, and complain that life is not fair.

In this Sunday's Gospel (Luke 15:1-3, 11-32), we hear about a person getting something absolutely undeserved.

Jesus tells a parable about a man with two sons. The younger son, tired of work and anxious for the good life, demands his share of the inheritance that would come to him when his father died. The father strangely agrees and that son goes off and wastes his inheritance on a reckless "life of dissipation."

When he ends up broke, friendless, and living on a pig farm, he decides to return home and see if his father might consider taking him back as a hired hand. For as he says to himself, and later to his father, "I have sinned against heaven and against you. I no longer deserved to be called your son."

And he was right. He certainly no longer deserved to be treated as a loving son. He had wished his father dead, he had publicly insulted his father by his outrageous behavior, he had placed little value on what his father had given him, and he had turned his back on his family responsibilities.

The older son definitely agreed that his younger brother had forfeited the title of "son." In fact, he was so angry with his younger brother that he refused to even be in the same room with him upon his return.

But the father did not treat that younger son as he deserved. Instead he ordered a celebration to mark his return and he announced, "This son of mine was dead, and has come to life gain, he was lost, and has been found."

The father showed his younger son undeserved mercy and forgiveness. After all, what could that son do to erase the heartbreak, hurt, worry, humiliation, and financial loss he had caused his father?

What the father did for that younger son is what God our Father does for us. God does not treat us as we deserve, instead God treats us with mercy.

If God treated us as we deserve we would end up in a place far worse than any pig farm. We sin, we turn our backs on God, we break our baptismal promises, and we often squander the time, talents, and blessings God gives us. In short, we do not always live as faithful sons and daughters of our heavenly Father.

Yet God does not treat us as we deserve, God shows us undeserved mercy.

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