

# **LOOKING TO SUNDAY®**

**Sunday, March 20, 2016**

## ***Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord***

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.

### **INJUSTICE SUNDAY**

As good people we have a sense of justice. If someone is arrested and accused of a crime and that person is judged to be innocent, we expect that individual to be set free.

But if that person is judged to be guilty, we expect that person to be punished for his or her offense.

When that does not happen, we believe an injustice has occurred. An injustice that must be righted. The innocent should not be punished and the guilty should not be set free.

In fact, there are organizations, such as the "Innocence Project," dedicated to exonerating those wrongfully convicted of capital offenses and reforming the judicial system to prevent future injustices.

This Sunday, Passion Sunday, might be called "Injustice Sunday." It is a day when we read a Gospel passage (Luke 22:14 – 23:56) that tells of an innocent person being convicted and punished, and guilty people being set free.

In Sunday's account of the Passion, Jesus is condemned to death and crucified despite the fact that he is declared innocent not once but six separate times in that reading. Pilate the governor, the representative of Roman justice, after questioning Jesus declares, "I find this man not guilty."

After further inquiry Pilate affirms his initial verdict. He says, "I have conducted my investigation in your presence and have not found this man guilty of the charges you have brought against him."

Finally, Pilate says the same thing a third time, "What evil has this man done? I found him guilty of no capital crime."

In addition, Herod, the local Jewish king, to whom Pilate sends Jesus seeking his input, reaches the same conclusion. Herod sends Jesus back to the Roman governor without finding him deserving of punishment. As Pilate tells the people, "Herod ... sent him back to us. So no capital crime has been committed by him."

Despite those verdicts, Pilate gives into the demands of the crowd calling for the crucifixion of Jesus. Then as Jesus hangs on the cross, his life slowly and painfully draining away, he is declared guiltless once more. One of the two criminals being executed with Jesus says, "this man has done nothing criminal."

Then after Jesus dies, those previous declarations of his innocence are summed up by the centurion witnessing his crucifixion. "This man was innocent beyond doubt."

While Jesus, the innocent one, is unjustly condemned and executed, his death brings about the release of two men who were undoubtedly guilty.

The arrest of Jesus led Pilate to offer the people a choice. Do they want him to free Barabbas, a rebel and a murderer, or Jesus? When the crowd cries for the release of Barabbas, he is set free. If it were not for Jesus, Barabbas would have met the fate that befell Jesus. The death of the innocent one leads to the release and freedom of the guilty.

The same thing happens at the “place call the Skull.” One of the criminals who had admitted that he “had been condemned justly” asks, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus replies, “Today you will be with me in paradise.” Once again, the innocent one brings mercy to the guilty.

The same thing holds true for us. By our personal sins and selfishness, by what we have done and by what we have failed to do, we stand guilty before God and deserving of punishment.

But we are forgiven, we are brought into a new relationship with God, and promised eternal life, all through the death of the Innocent One.

The injustice suffered by Jesus became the source of mercy for Barabbas and the source of eternal life for the “good thief.” And it has become the source of mercy and life for us. This is one time when an act of injustice resulted in something good and wonderful for us all.

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