

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, March 23, 2025

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.

Looking to Sunday has been published for more than sixteen years.

THE FOURTH QUARTER

The playing time for basketball, football, and lacrosse is divided into four quarters. The length of each quarter depends on the sport and the level of play. A quarter might last from 8 to 15 minutes. As a result, a team knows it has only so many minutes to score enough points to win a game.

In this Sunday's Gospel (Luke 13:1-9), Jesus tells a parable that might remind us of these four quarters of playing time. He speaks of a man who has a fig tree growing in his orchard. Each season, the man comes to the tree but finds no fruit on it. He tells his gardener, "For three years now I have come in search of fruit on this fig tree but have found none. So cut it down. Why should it exhaust the soil?"

We might say that the tree has been taking up space for three years, for "three quarters," and has not produced a single fig during all that time.

The gardener requests the owner to give that tree one more year, a "fourth quarter," to produce a harvest. During that time, the gardener says he will give the tree special care and attention. At the end of that fourth year, if the tree has not "scored" a harvest of figs, it will be cut down.

Jesus relates that parable to emphasize the importance of turning from sin and producing a harvest of goodness. We heard that message in a powerful way at the start of this Lenten season. On Ash Wednesday, we were marked with ashes and told, "Repent, and believe in the Gospel."

This Sunday's Gospel challenges us to ask ourselves if we are taking that message to heart. Are we sincerely trying to turn from sin and embrace the message of the Gospel?

If the Lord came to check on us, as the master came to check on his fig tree, would he find us producing a fruitful harvest of love, mercy and compassion or would he be disappointed at our lack of fruit?

The fig tree in the parable was in its fourth quarter and had only one more year to produce or it would be cut down. Unlike that tree, we never know how many years we have to produce the fruit that the Lord expects from us.

We often live as if we have many years of "playing time," but we never know when we are in the "fourth quarter." Certainly, the people that Jesus speaks about in Sunday's Gospel who were murdered by Pilate and those suddenly killed by a falling tower did not know their end was coming.

This Sunday, Jesus calls us to repent and to start producing the fruit God expects of us. We need to live each day as if we are in the fourth quarter!

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