

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, March 25, 2018

Palm Sunday of the Lord's Passion

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.

THE RIGHT QUESTION

Sometimes when we are looking for an answer, we ask the wrong question.

For example, if a co-worker, who obviously enjoys his or her job and is very happy at the company, suddenly leaves, we might ask, "Why did you quit?" That question assumes that quitting was something that worker wanted to do.

But if we asked, "Why were you let go?" that question would imply something very different. It would convey our belief that the person's leaving was not his or her personal decision. Those in higher management positions evidently decided to terminate our co-worker's employment.

This Sunday, Passion Sunday, we hear the account of the suffering and death of Jesus as recorded by Saint Mark (Mark 14:1-15:47), very likely the earliest account of the Passion found in the New Testament.

After hearing Sunday's Gospel we might ask, "Why? Why did Jesus die on the cross?"

Asking the question that way would seem to imply that dying on the cross was something Jesus wanted to do.

We might think that Jesus embraced the cross since it was what the Father expected. It was the price that had to be paid to ransom humanity from sin and death and restore humanity's relationship with God.

So out of love for us, out of obedience to the Father, Jesus made the decision to walk the path that lead from the Upper Room, to the Garden of Gethsemane, to the courtyard of the high priest, to the palace of Pilate, and finally to Golgotha and death on the cross.

However, that was not a walk that Jesus sought out. As Mark tells us, Jesus "fell to the ground and prayed that if it were possible the hour might pass by him."

Furthermore, if we believe that Jesus chose his death to satisfy the justice of God and gain forgiveness for humanity, that contradicts the image of God found in the parable of the Prodigal Son. There the father forgives his wayward son and joyously restores him to the family. The father makes no demand for satisfaction. He requires no acts of penance.

Perhaps asking, "Why did Jesus die on the cross" is not the right question. Perhaps we need to ask, "Why was Jesus killed?"

That question implies that Jesus was the victim of evil. The cross was not his desire, nor the desire of his heavenly Father.

Jesus was killed, thrown on the cross by religious leaders afraid of losing their position, afraid of opening their hearts to what God was doing, afraid of what might happen if Rome felt its power was being questioned.

Jesus was killed because a Roman governor was afraid of a crowd and unwilling to risk a riot to save a Jewish nobody who some claimed to be a king.

Jesus was killed because a crowd could be easily swayed and scream for crucifixion.

We should not ask, "Why did Jesus die?" Rather we should ask, "Why was Jesus killed?" Asking that second question will help us to see that the Passion of Jesus was not something desired by Jesus nor required by the Father. Rather it was something that came about because sin, evil, and darkness were at work in human hearts. Or as Jesus himself put it "the light came into the world, but people preferred darkness to light, because their works were evil." (John 3:19)

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