

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, March 31, 2019

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.

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

LEARNING FROM CONSEQUENCES

Parents are protective of their children. Most parents do all they can to prevent their sons and daughters from making bad decisions. And when they do make bad decisions, those parents will often do all they can to keep their children from suffering the consequences.

The father in this Sunday's Gospel parable (Luke 15:1-3, 11-32) was not that kind of parent. While he loved his two sons, he allowed them the freedom to make decisions – even bad decisions --and he let them suffer the consequences that followed their choices.

In that parable, the father was approached by his younger son. The son had decided he had enough of living at home, working on the farm, and obeying his father. He wanted to leave home but before he did, he wanted to receive his share of the inheritance.

Basically, he told his father that he did not want to wait around for him to die before he could enjoy the money that would eventually come to him. Certainly, such a request would have deeply hurt and embarrassed the father before his relatives and friends.

Amazingly the father, rather than punishing his son on the spot, did as the boy requested.

The father, who knew his son probably better than the boy knew himself, realized his son was making a horrible decision, one that would lead to disaster.

The son was given his inheritance, and as we know, he truly was a prodigal son. He was a wasteful, irresponsible young man, who quickly burned through all his money.

Being penniless and hungry, he ended up taking care of a herd of pigs – a job that any Jew would have found utterly repulsive.

But the father, who deeply missed his son, did not come to his rescue. The father did not send servants to check on him. He did not use his influence to get him a better job. The father let his son suffer the consequences of his bad decision.

Eventually that wayward son realized that he needed the father whom he had so callously rejected when he decided to leave home.

When the father saw his son returning, he ran out and embraced him. He welcomed him back. He restored the relationship his son had severed by his selfish decision.

The story of the wayward son and that wise and loving father mirrors humanity's relationship with God.

God gave the people he created the freedom to make their own decisions, even bad decisions. And unfortunately from the start, people have been deciding “to leave home” and go their own way. They have sinned.

God, like the father of our parable, allows his children to suffer the consequences of their bad decisions, not to punish them but rather to bring them to their senses. To help them realize that turning away from him, that leaving their father’s house, only brings them into the pig sty of sin and selfishness.

When we sinners realize our need to return home, God the Father embraces us and restores us to himself. We see that in the healing and forgiving ministry of Jesus, a ministry that continues through the Church, especially through the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

God allows us to make bad decisions. May the consequences we suffer give us the wisdom to see what the prodigal son eventually came to realize. True happiness and peace are only found when we are at home with the Father!

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