

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, April 7, 2019

The Fifth 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.

THE VIEW OF JESUS

All people do not view things in the same way. That is why we have divergent opinions, opposing political parties, rival cable news stations, and conflicting messages on social media. In this Sunday's Gospel (John 8:1-11), we learn of people viewing a situation in very different ways.

While Jesus is teaching in the temple area, the Pharisees drag a woman before him who had been "caught in the very act of committing adultery." The Pharisees see her as deserving of death. As they tell Jesus, "Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women."

The Pharisees also see the situation as offering them a perfect opportunity to attack Jesus and to lessen the people's admiration for this prophet from Nazareth, so they ask Jesus if the law of Moses should be followed.

The Pharisees knew that if Jesus said the woman should be freed, he would be seen as opposing the moral code of his people and the teaching of Moses.

However, if Jesus agreed that the adulterous woman should be stoned, the people would see him as contradicting his message of forgiveness and mercy. Moreover, if Jesus consented to the stoning, he would put himself in jeopardy with the Roman occupiers who prohibited the Jews from administering capital punishment.

That prohibition was the reason that later in the Gospel account, the Jewish authorities would bring Jesus before Pilate, the Roman Governor, to ask that Jesus be crucified.

But Jesus recognizes the scheme of the Pharisees. He realizes their true motivation and their hypocrisy. Instead of immediately responding, he lets the tension rise as he traces on the sand with his finger. Then Jesus stands up and looks at those armed with stones and throws a challenge at them. "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." With their self-righteous attitude knocked out of them, the Pharisees slip away.

That day Jesus saw the same thing as the Pharisees did, namely, a woman guilty of adultery. After all he warned her, "from now on do not sin any more."

But Jesus also saw something beyond her sin. Jesus saw what the woman could become if she were touched with the mercy and grace of God. Unlike the Pharisees, Jesus believed her future did not have to be determined by her past transgressions of the law of Moses.

When the Pharisees looked at the woman caught in adultery, they saw a sinner who was lost. However, Jesus also saw a sinner, but a sinner who could change.

Today, Jesus continues to see us sinners in the same way. That is why he calls us to repentance, that is why he gives us this Season of Lent, that is why he offers us forgiveness in the Sacrament of Penance.

Thankfully, the Lord does not see our future determined by our past sins and failings.

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