

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, April 12, 2015

This email, entitled Looking to Sunday®, focuses on the Gospel Reading 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 HARDEST TO FORGIVE

What hurts more, being called a "stupid, inconsiderate jerk" by a stranger or by a friend? What is more painful, being lied to or gossiped about by someone we barely know or by a person we consider one of our closest friends?

There is little doubt that any hurt is greater when it is caused by someone who has a place in our hearts than when it is caused by someone with whom we have no emotional connection.

Since that is the case, it follows that it is harder to forgive a friend who has hurt us than to forgive a stranger. We have no expectations of strangers other than common decency. But we expect our friends to be faithful and loyal and to treat us with love, kindness, and respect.

This Sunday's Gospel (John 20:19-31) is about a person who forgives his friends for the pain and hurt they caused him. In fact, he forgives them even before they express a word of sorrow and remorse. That person is the Risen Lord.

We know Jesus was merciful and forgiving. He reached out to sinners and to outcasts. He offered forgiveness to the adulterous woman who was dragged before him for condemnation. "Neither do I condemn you. Go, and from now on do not sin any more." (John 8:11)

He forgave the sins of the paralyzed man who was lowered down before him through the roof. As Jesus told him, "As for you, your sins are forgiven." (Luke 5:20)

He even forgave those who crucified him. "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." (Luke 23:34)

However, those persons were not close friends and disciples of Jesus. They were strangers, and some were even his enemies.

In this Sunday's Gospel (John 20:19-31), Jesus the Risen Lord forgives his closest friends. Instead of remaining faithful as they had promised, they had deserted him and run for their lives when he was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. We can only imagine how hurt Jesus must have been as he saw the hateful faces of those coming to arrest him and the backs of his disciples as they fled in fear for their lives.

Yet when the Risen Lord appeared to those unfaithful disciples, those disloyal friends, that first Easter Sunday, rather than expressing his anger and disappointment, he said, "Peace be with you." And he said it not once but twice.

With those words Jesus forgave his friends whose actions and disloyalty were certainly more painful than the actions of Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, or the Roman guards. Jesus had no expectations of them, but he certainly had expectations of those with whom he had shared his life and shared his final meal.

Jesus forgave his friends, and he still does so today. He forgives us. We are the ones who are his brothers and sisters, made so in the waters of baptism. We are the ones who are privileged to share at his holy table. We are ones he calls his friends, for through the scriptures and through his Church he has told us everything he heard from the Father. (John 15:15)

But at times we are disloyal and unfaithful friends who turn our backs on him, forget our baptismal promises, and fail to live as we should as Christians. Despite that, the Lord keeps coming to us offering us peace and forgiveness. The Lord Jesus never gives up his friends, no matter how often we give up on him. He has Divine Mercy!

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Happy Easter Season!
May the Risen Lord touch your life with his mercy and peace!