

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, April 13, 2025

Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord

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.

CROSS OR CRUCIFIX

Every building where Christians gather in prayer has a cross somewhere inside the structure and usually on the outside as well. The cross is the preeminent Christian symbol.

However, a church where Catholics gather has more than a bare cross on display inside the building. It has a crucifix, a cross with an image of the crucified Lord. But crucifixes are not only in Catholic churches. They are found in most Catholic homes. Crucifixes are also attached to rosary beads and religious medals, made part of devotional displays, worn outwardly as part of a religious habit, and fastened to necklaces.

Certainly, the crucifix is the image most associated with the Gospel reading that will be proclaimed at Mass this Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord (Luke 22:14-23:56). That Gospel relates the events that led to Jesus being crucified even though he was innocent.

Pilate had stated that both he and Herod had "not found this man guilty of the charges" brought against him. The innocence of Jesus was also affirmed by one of the criminals being executed with him, who said "this man has done nothing criminal," and by the Roman centurion who watched him die and proclaimed, "This man was innocent beyond doubt."

Jesus was crucified not for doing evil, but for doing good. Throughout his ministry, Jesus had remained faithful to the passage from Isaiah that he had applied to himself in the synagogue in Nazareth. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord" (Luke 4:18-19).

In faithfully carrying out that mission and remaining true to his identity as the One sent by God, Jesus had become a threat to the religious authorities—a threat that had to be dealt with.

The crucifix that we Catholics cherish and look upon in our churches reminds us of the injustice suffered by Jesus, and it also proclaims his faith and trust in God and his love for the people he came to save.

The cross with the image of the crucified Lord also reminds us that life is not fair, that bad things happen to good people, that pain and sickness are part of the human condition, that being innocent does not save us from false accusations and condemnation, and that sometimes it feels as if life is nailing us to a cross.

A bare cross can remind us of God's love. But a crucifix not only proclaims God's love, it assures us that God knows the pain and suffering that come with being human and assures us that the Lord is with us through it all.

We might say a cross proclaims the Christian faith, while a crucifix proclaims that the Christian faith has something to say about the suffering and challenges that we face in our lives.

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