

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, May 20, 2018

Pentecost Sunday

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.

FORGIVERS OF SIN

Certain Gospel passages are associated with certain sacraments.

For example, Jesus being baptized by John in the River Jordan relates to the Sacrament of Baptism.

Jesus changing water into wine at the wedding feast of Cana is associated with the Sacrament of Marriage.

Jesus feeding a crowd of thousands with five loaves and two fish recalls the Sacrament of the Eucharist.

In this Sunday's Gospel for Pentecost (John 20:19-23), we have a passage that seems to relate to the Sacrament of Penance, the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We hear how the Risen Lord appears to his disciples that first Easter Sunday evening and says, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

Certainly, that association with the Sacrament of Reconciliation is correct. In fact, we might say those disciples had an experience of forgiveness and reconciliation when the Risen Lord said to them, "Peace be with you." For they were the very same disciples, who despite their avowals of loyalty and faithfulness, had abandoned Jesus when he was arrested and later led to crucifixion. In wishing them "peace," Jesus restored his relationship with them.

But we should not restrict those words in Sunday's Gospel only to the Sacrament of Penance and only to the Church's official ministers of reconciliation. Those words can apply to all Christians who are blessed with the Spirit given by Jesus.

Led by the Spirit, we are to forgive sins – the sins committed against us. As we pray in the Our Father, "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

We live in a society very much in need of people willing to forgive the sins, the injustices, the slights, the annoyances they experience in life. Rather than forgiveness, it seems there is an ever-increasing response of rage, anger, revenge, condemnation, insults, accusations, and vengeful behavior.

We see it displayed in road rage, vile rants on Twitter, hateful postings on Facebook, the silence of family members who refuse to talk to one another, political differences that deteriorate into tirades of four letter words, an inclination to think the worst of another's motives, and a readiness to let perceived slights escalate to violence.

Those who show forgiveness, those who let things go, those who do not return injury with injury, are perceived as weak. Yet who was stronger than Jesus, the forgiving one? The one who blessed us with his Spirit that we might be agents of mercy in our day.

The words of Jesus, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained," apply not only to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, they apply to all Christians. We are all to be forgivers of sin! And perhaps it is by showing such forgiveness that we most powerfully proclaim that the Lord is risen and has blessed us with his Spirit!

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