

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, June 7, 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.

A CHALICE OF IMPORTANCE

If someone who was a non-believer spent several Sunday mornings visiting Catholic Churches and watching what happened at Mass, that person would arrive at a number of conclusions.

Certainly that observer would conclude that almost everyone at Mass believed it was important to come forward to receive the wafers of bread proclaimed to be "The Body of Christ." In fact, the person might assume that was the main reason people came since many seemed less than engaged during other parts of the ceremony.

The person observing would also conclude that drinking from the chalice was far less important since most of those who came forward to receive the "bread" just passed by the chalice. What was proclaimed to be "The Blood of Christ" must be less significant. That especially would be the case if the observer saw that in some churches the chalice was not even offered to the congregation, only the priest ate and drank during this ritual meal.

This Sunday's Gospel reading (Mark 14:12-16, 22-26) for the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of the Lord contradicts that conclusion.

The reading, which recounts the events of the Last Supper, highlights the significance of receiving the Blood of Christ. There Jesus speaks of the wine shared by his disciples as the "blood of the covenant."

In the scriptures we read how God made covenants, life-giving agreements, with his Chosen People. Those covenants were sealed with an animal sacrifice and the shedding of blood. Now God was making a new and everlasting covenant to be sealed and ratified in the blood of Christ.

To understand the significance of blood in such covenants, we need to appreciate that for the Jewish people blood meant life. Life was in the blood. When a person or animal had blood, it had life. When the blood drained away, death followed.

The blood of Jesus meant life, divine life!

His blood was like the blood of the Passover lamb smeared on the doors of the Chosen People. As that blood preserved the lives of those within from the angel of death that claimed the first born of the Egyptians, so the blood of Jesus preserved believers from eternal death.

The blood of Jesus was also like the blood that Moses splashed on the altar and upon the assembled people at Sinai. That blood ratified the life-giving relationship between God and his people – an event recalled in this Sunday's First Reading. So the blood of Jesus brought about a new and eternal covenant that would reach fulfillment in the kingdom of heaven. As he said, "This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many." Each time we receive Holy Communion that new covenant is renewed.

In receiving the consecrated host we are reminded of who we are. We who receive the Body of Christ are the body of Christ in our world. In receiving the consecrated wine we are reminded of the life-giving power that flows within us, the very Blood of Christ.

If we truly understood what was contained in the chalice, we would drink deeply of the life that God offers us. We would not pass by the blood of our new and eternal covenant with God!

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