

# **LOOKING TO SUNDAY®**

**Sunday, June 19, 2016**

## ***The Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time***

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.

### **A BURDEN OR A BLESSING?**

"My children won't go to Sunday Mass anymore. They used to come with us, but now they refuse. We don't know what to do."

All priests have heard such comments from distraught parents – parents looking for an explanation and for advice. They come to Mass every Sunday, they pray at home, they send their children for religious instruction, sometimes sacrificing to enroll them in Catholic school, and they make certain that their sons and daughters receive the sacraments.

They are parents who give good example and practice what they preach. But despite that, sometimes their children start saying, "NO" when it comes to Mass and living their Catholic faith.

Parents start wondering what they did wrong.

Some of that resistance can be attributed to adolescent rebellion and to the influence of our culture that increasingly disparages organized religion and disdains authority of any sort.

But this Sunday's Gospel (Luke 9:18-24) offers another possible explanation.

In that Gospel Jesus asks the disciples what people are saying about him. They respond that some think that he is "John the Baptist, others, Elijah, still others, 'One of the ancient prophets has arisen.'"

Often teenagers and also adults know the same answers. They know what others are saying about Jesus but they do not personally know him. If asked to explain who Jesus is, they simply repeat what they have heard in religion classes or at church. Jesus is the Savior, the Redeemer, the Messiah, and the Son of God. Jesus was a prophet, a teacher, a miracle worker, a religious leader, etc. They mouth answers spoken by others, but those responses hold little meaning for them.

In the Gospel Jesus asks another question, the central question, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter responds, "The Christ of God." Peter gives a personal response. He does not simply parrot what he has heard.

But interestingly Jesus tells Peter and the disciples not to publicize that answer for they do not grasp its implications. For them the title "Christ" connotes power and authority, for Jesus it denotes suffering and the cross.

Only when a person truly knows Jesus and has a relationship with him is that person ready to follow him. Only then are they willing to embrace their daily cross, the daily effort it takes to faithfully live as a Christian. As Jesus says, "If anyone wishes to come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

We only sacrifice for those with whom we have some connection. The closer the relationship, the more we are willing to do. Certainly this Sunday, Father's Day, reminds us of that. The closer the relationship that a man has with his children, the more that father is willing to sacrifice for their good.

The same is true when it comes to our faith. Christianity is not a collection of facts to learn, or a set of rituals to undergo, or a series of religious ceremonies to attend, or a moral code to follow. It is an ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ who extends God's hand in friendship.

Once we have such a personal relationship with Jesus, why would we ever miss Mass or fail to practice our faith. We would want to be with him, to gather with his friends, to hear him speak to us in the scriptures, and to share his life in the Eucharist.

If Jesus is just an abstract, distant figure known only through the words of others, he will hardly command the attention and devotion of a teenager, or anyone else. But once Jesus becomes a person whom we know and love, then being with him at Mass and being part of his Church is not a burden to avoid, but a blessing to enjoy!

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