

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, June 24, 2018

The Nativity of Saint John the Baptist

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 BIRTHDAY, A VOTE

Only three birthdays have a place on the Church's calendar. The birthday of Jesus on December 25, the birthday of Mary, September 8, and the birthday of John the Baptist, which we commemorate this Sunday, June 24.

This year the birthday of John the Baptist has added significance in light of what occurred in Ireland just one month ago. On Friday, May 25, the people of Ireland voted overwhelmingly to repeal the eighth amendment to their constitution. This amendment, which became part of the Irish constitution in 1983, gave the unborn fetus an equal right to life to that of a pregnant woman. The approved change will now state that "Provision may be made by law for the regulation of termination of pregnancy."

The result of this vote comes as little surprise since we live in a world where abortion is regarded by more and more people as simply part of "health care." Though how such a procedure helps the health of an unborn child is yet to be explained.

This Sunday's readings dealing with the birth of John the Baptist proclaim a message that stands in sharp contrast to society's seeming disregard for the value of unborn life.

In our First Reading from the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 49:1-6), which the Church sees as referring to John the Baptist, we hear of the one formed as God's servant from the womb of his mother.

Then in the Responsorial Psalm (Psalm 139), which follows that reading, the psalmist sings, "Truly you have formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb. I give you thanks that I am fearfully, wonderfully made."

We read in Sunday's Gospel (Luke 1:57-66, 80) that Elizabeth, instead of naming her baby son after Zechariah, as was expected, insists her boy be named John. For it was the name given to him by the angel before he was conceived.

Even in the womb, John the Baptist began to announce the coming of the Messiah. We are told that when the pregnant Mary came to visit Elizabeth who was in her sixth month, the developing John the Baptist recognized the presence of Mary's unborn son. As Elizabeth told Mary, "For at the moment the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy." (Luke 1:44)

The conception, development, birth, and naming of John the Baptist certainly revealed that the plan of God was at work. So much so that "all who heard these things took them to heart, saying, 'What, then, will this child be?' For surely the hand of the Lord was with him."

That hand of the Lord is with every child. For at the moment of conception, it is God who brings a new life into existence.

When that developing life is terminated by abortion we need to ask ourselves a version of the question posed by the people in Sunday's Gospel. When they saw the infant in the arms of his parents they wondered what the future would hold for that child. They wondered what role God had in mind for this child of Elizabeth and Zechariah.

When we consider the millions of children whose lives are ended before they can come forth into this world, we might ask ourselves, "What, then could these children have become?"

What blessings from God has our society so indifferently discarded? What prophets of God has our world aborted?

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