

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, June 26, 2016

The Thirteenth 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.

SHIFT IN FOCUS

Facebook, Netflix, Instagram, Twitter, YouTube, cable channels, television programs, radio broadcasts, sporting events, concerts, films, advertising, text messaging, voice mail, email, websites, video games, and much more all compete for our attention 24 hours a day.

Those forms of communication and entertainment often succeed in taking our focus from what is truly important, namely, our family obligations, our work responsibilities, our relationship with God, and even our personal health and safety. That is more than ever the case when the digital devices we can carry in our pockets can connect us with everything that competes for our attention.

At Mass, people can be seen glancing at the screens of their smart phones rather than raising their eyes to the Lord in prayer and there is seldom a service that is not interrupted by a cell phone's seemingly unstoppable ring.

At family meals, children often pay more attention to the alerts that signal the arrival of text messages than they do to what is being said at the table.

At work meetings, participants arrive with pen and paper, but also with their ever-present digital device carefully placed on their laps, out of their employer's view but not out of their own.

On the streets of our cities, there are drivers and pedestrians who sometimes injure and even kill themselves and others as they talk and text rather than focusing on where they are going and what they should be doing.

If Jesus were physically with us as he was 2,000 years ago, the odds are great that he would not allow anything or anyone to shift his focus from what was truly important. He would not be walking around glancing at his smart phone, sending out tweets, posting selfies to Facebook, receiving and sending text messages, stopping to catch up with the latest episode of his favorite series on Netflix, or surfing his favorite websites and blogs whenever he found a WiFi hotspot. No, Jesus would be focused – mission focused.

We certainly see an indication of that in this Sunday's Gospel (Luke 9:51-62). In it we are told, "when the days for Jesus' being taken up were fulfilled, he resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem."

Jesus was resolute. He would not allow anything to distract him from his mission of proclaiming the kingdom of God and being faithful to his relationship with the Father, not even the opposition, the suffering, and the cross that awaited him in Jerusalem.

When a Samaritan town refused to receive Jesus because he was on his way to Jerusalem, rather than confront the hostile residents or punish them with “fire from heaven” as James and John suggested, Jesus simply made a detour. He did not allow his focus to shift from his forward movement to Jerusalem.

Jesus also expected that same kind of resolve and focus from those who wished to follow him. In Sunday’s Gospel Jesus tells three would-be disciples that following him would mean they would have no permanent home, they would have to join him at once, and they would have to keep their eyes on the road ahead and not on what they had left behind.

Today, Jesus expects us to be “resolutely determined” like him. Our focus, our attention has to be centered on living as Christians whose values and decisions are inspired by the Gospel and guided by the command of Jesus to love others just as he did.

In Sunday’s Second Reading (Galatians 1:1, 13-18), Paul encourages us to use the freedom Christ has given us to “serve one another through love. For the whole law is fulfilled in one statement, namely, *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.*” Paul warns us to “not submit again to the yoke of slavery.”

While Paul saw that yoke of slavery as sin, we might think of it another way. The digital devices and today’s ever increasing barrage of entertainment and information may be the yoke of slavery that weighs us down and shifts our focus from what is truly important. More than ever Jesus needs focused disciples, “resolutely determined” to follow him.

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