

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, July 3, 2016

The Fourteenth 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.

TALKING RELIGION

On July 4, we as citizens of the United States celebrate the day when we formally declared our independence.

240 years ago those living in the thirteen English colonies began their struggle to free themselves from the power of the king and to assure themselves the freedoms they believed came from God. Included among them were freedom of speech and freedom of religion.

While those freedoms were won and are enshrined in our Constitution and laws, limitations are often placed on those freedoms, not so much by the government but rather by our relatives and friends.

That is especially true when we are going to a family party or social event. Sometimes we are told, "Don't talk religion and politics." That suggested limitation on our freedom comes from knowing that in any group of people there will be a wide variety of opinions concerning religion and politics.

Since those two topics involve emotional issues, the discussions they generate can become quite heated and sometimes can even cause relationships to end. That being the case we might be advised to discuss the weather and sports, but not God and Government, not Church and Congress, not Pope and President. In short, "Don't talk religion and politics."

In this super-charged political environment, not expressing our political views might be a good idea. Letting our votes speak rather than our mouths might lead to better digestion and calmer social encounters. "Don't talk politics."

However when it comes to religion, Jesus would not agree with the notion of keeping our faith and our beliefs to ourselves. In fact, in this Sunday's Gospel (Luke 10:1-12, 17-20), Jesus seems to be saying, "Talk religion."

Jesus sends out 72 disciples to the places he hopes to visit in the future. He sends them out in pairs to support and encourage one another. He instructs them to travel light, to accept hospitality wherever it is offered, and to tell all those they encounter, "The kingdom of God is at hand."

They are to announce that God is acting in the world, that God is offering mercy and forgiveness, that God is calling humanity to a new relationship with him, that God is inviting all people to embrace his kingdom of love, justice, and peace.

If their message was accepted that would be wonderful. But if people refused to listen, if they closed their ears, those disciples were not to engage in debate, controversy, and confrontation. They were simply to move on. As Jesus told them, if "they do not receive you, go out into the

streets and say, 'The dust of your town that clings to our feet, even that we shake off against you.' Yet know this: the kingdom of God is at hand."

Today, we are the disciples the Lord sends into our society. He wants us to do good things to be sure, but he also wants us to announce, "The kingdom of God is at hand."

For most of us that does not mean preaching on a street corner, but it may mean encouraging someone with a quote from the scriptures, saying grace before meals at home and in a restaurant, telling a coworker who is struggling that he or she is in our prayers, inviting someone to join us for Mass, bringing Gospel values into a conversation about social issues, refusing to do something unethical and being willing to explain that faithfulness to God comes above all else, and sharing with others how our relationship with Christ and his Church brings meaning and joy to our personal lives.

While it may be advisable to avoid talking politics, not talking religion is not something the Lord would recommend.

Jesus would tell us what he told his disciples, "Say to them, 'The kingdom of God is at hand for you.'"

Jesus would tell us, "Talk religion!"

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