

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, July 8, 2018

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.

"THICK SKIN"

Those who call us on our phones trying to sell some product or service or come to our doors soliciting our support for a charity or cause need to have a "thick skin!" They need to be able to endure rejection. A sensitive person could never deal with the criticism, insults and countless refusals that come with such work.

In this Sunday's readings we hear about people who were dealing with rejection.

In the First Reading (Ezekiel 2:2-5), God sends the prophet Ezekiel to deliver his message to the Israelites. But God warns the prophet that he will face a hostile audience, people who are "hard of face and obstinate of heart." People, who like their ancestors, have rebelled against God.

Then in our Gospel, Jesus confronts rejection and criticism. After preaching and healing in other places, he comes back home to Nazareth. There he is invited to teach in the synagogue. The hometown folks are astonished at his words, but that astonishment soon turns to rejection.

Who was Jesus to be preaching to them? What made him some kind of authority? Wasn't he just the "carpenter, the son of Mary?" Didn't they know all his relatives? "And they took offense at him."

As Jesus concludes, "A prophet is not without honor except in his native place and among his own kin and in his own house."

Certainly, Jesus suffered rejection many times in his ministry, but the rejection by those who knew him and knew his family may have been the most difficult to bear. Mark tells us, Jesus "was amazed at their lack of faith."

But despite the closed hearts and minds they encountered, despite the rejection they experienced, Ezekiel and Jesus continued to deliver God's message.

They were energized by the Spirit of God. They were certain of their mission. They were convinced people needed to hear their life-giving words. They believed that being faithful to God was more important than winning the approval of their audience. All of that gave Ezekiel and Jesus the "thick skin" to continue on.

As followers of Christ, we have the task of sharing our faith, of inviting others to be part of the Church, of living according to the moral demands of the Gospel, and of putting our love of God in action by working for justice and peace and helping the suffering.

But when we do those things in a society that is increasingly hostile to religion and uncomfortable with those whose values and lifestyle align with the Gospel, we face the possibility of rejection, criticism, insult, and ridicule.

Because of the fear of such things, we often keep our faith and beliefs so quiet that perhaps the only time our coworkers and neighbors have any idea we are Christians is on Ash Wednesday or at Christmas.

If we are to fulfill the mission God has given us we need to call upon the power and strength of the Holy Spirit and we need to develop “thick skins” that can deal with rejection.

Whether people accept or reject us is not the important thing. As the prophet Ezekiel was told “whether they heed or resist...they shall know that a prophet has been among them.” In our case, whether they heed or resist, they shall know that Christians are among them!

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