

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, July 15, 2018

The Fifteenth 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.

DOING THE MORE IMPORTANT

Throughout the Gospels we hear Jesus instructing his disciples. He commands them to love God and to love their neighbor. He tells them to forgive their enemies and to pray for their persecutors. He directs them to care for the poor and the suffering. He warns them not to let a desire for money, possessions, or power rule their lives.

In this Sunday's Gospel (Mark 6:7-13), we hear the instructions that Jesus gives his apostles as he sends them out to preach repentance, to confront evil, and bring healing to the sick. He instructs them to take nothing with them "but a walking stick—no food, no sack, no money in their belts." They are, however, to wear sandals but not to take an extra tunic. He tells them, "Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave. Whatever place does not welcome you or listen to you, leave there and shake the dust off your feet."

In contemporary language, as Jesus sends out his disciples he tells them to go forth with only the clothes on their backs, a good pair of shoes on their feet, and a walking stick in hand. They are to take no luggage, no supply of food, and no cash or credit cards. He instructs them to travel in pairs and to depend on the charity of others and to presume upon the hospitality of anyone who welcomes them.

Those are certainly challenging instructions – and they apply to us. For the directives of Jesus were meant not just for the disciples of his day but for all Christians. But what person today would leave home with no money, with no extra clothing, with no idea where they would stay, and with a mission more suited to starry-eyed evangelists than to realistic people.

We need to remember that when Jesus gave his apostles those instructions, he had mentored them for some time. They had seen his style and approach to ministry. They had witnessed him doing what he instructed them to do. He had prepared them for what he was asking.

If we are to follow those instructions of Jesus, we need to wisely and prudently apply them to our life situations. Standing penniless and homeless on a street corner, calling upon those walking by to repent, and trying to convince strangers to let us stay in their homes and eat at their tables, would meet with little, if any, success.

What Jesus is asking is that we encourage people to repent. That does not mean calling people sinners and threatening them with hell, but it means inviting them to embrace the joyful vision and understanding of life that Jesus proposed and lived – what he called the kingdom of God.

It means not letting money, possessions, and worries occupy our thoughts and drain our time and energy. It means not allowing ourselves to be frozen by failure when people do not respond, but moving on to the next person, just as Jesus did.

While we can easily disregard the instructions that Jesus gives in Sunday's Gospel as impractical, we need to see what was behind them. Once we know that, then we will know what Jesus most wants us to do.

In other words, carrying a walking stick and having an empty wallet are not as important as doing our best to share the message of Jesus!

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