

# **LOOKING TO SUNDAY®**

**Sunday, August 16, 2020**

## ***The Twentieth 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.

Looking to Sunday has been published for more than eleven years.

### **DISTANCING**

For the past few months, we have been living in a world of social distancing. People stay six feet apart from those not of their household. Businesses restrict the number of people allowed inside to limit social interaction. Customers are separated from cashiers by protective shields. Mass goers can sit only in certain pews. Expressions of joy, surprise, pain, and sorrow are unseen, hidden behind face masks.

But there is another kind of social distancing that began before the coronavirus made its unwanted appearance. People were social distancing themselves from those whose opinions and beliefs were not like their own.

Such distancing is especially evident in politics, particularly in this election season. People seem to be standing, literally and figuratively, apart from those holding opposing ideas.

In this Sunday's Gospel (Matthew 15:21-28), we read of an instance of social distancing based not on politics but on religion.

Jews at the time of the Gospels believed they alone were loved and chosen by God. He had freed them from slavery in Egypt and given them a land of their own. He had promised them a Messiah whose coming they awaited. Gentiles, non-Jews, were outside of God's care.

Jesus himself seemed to embrace that thinking. When he first sent out his Twelve Apostles, he instructed them to ignore the Gentiles. He told them, "Do not go into pagan territory or enter a Samaritan town. Go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matthew 10:5-6)

We see a dramatic illustration of Jesus himself doing just that in this Sunday's Gospel.

A Canaanite woman, a Gentile, comes to Jesus and pleads, "Have pity on me, Lord, Son of David! My daughter is tormented by a demon."

Jesus answers with silence. When she continues to plead, his disciples urge him to give her what she wants and get rid of her.

Jesus responds, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." When the woman refuses to give up, Jesus tells her, "It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs." In dramatic language, Jesus announces his mission is to the children, to the Jews – not to dogs, not to Gentiles who have no place in God's family.

Amazingly the woman does not slink away in shame but instead responds with one of the most famous comebacks in the scriptures. "Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters."

Jesus relents and grants the request of that distraught Gentile mother. The social distance between Jew and Gentile is overcome.

If Jesus had remained “religiously distant” from that Canaanite woman and from all Gentiles, the followers of Jesus might never have shared the Gospel beyond the Jewish nation.

In that encounter, Jesus may have come to realize his ministry was meant for Jew and Gentile alike, it was for all people. When Jesus gave his final instructions to his disciples, he made that clear. “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations.” (Matthew 28:19)

When it came to sharing the Gospel, followers of Jesus were not to socially distance themselves from Gentiles. If they had done so, Christianity would only be a small Jewish sect and we would not be part of God’s Church.

Social distancing may be required for reasons of health. But as we learn in this Sunday’s reading, it has no place when it comes to sharing the Gospel with others. And distancing ourselves from those with different opinions may not be good for our nation’s political health.

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