

# **LOOKING TO SUNDAY®**

**Sunday, August 17, 2014**

This email, entitled Looking to Sunday®, focuses on the Gospel Reading 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.

## **WHY INCLUDE IT?**

If we were going to write the life story of someone we admired, someone we thought of as a leader, a hero, an inspiration, we would naturally portray that person in a positive way.

If during our research we discovered an incident that lessened the reputation of the person we were writing about or put that person in a negative light, we could do one of three things. We could simply ignore what we discovered and not include it in the biography we were writing. We could write about the incident but then like a good defense lawyer we could offer an explanation of why our subject acted as he or she did. Or we could truthfully write about what happened and let the chips fall where they may.

In this Sunday's Gospel (Matthew 15:21-28), there is an incident in the ministry of Jesus that seems to portray him in a less than flattering way.

A Canaanite woman, a non-Jew, comes to Jesus begging him to help her daughter who is being tormented by a demon.

Rather than responding as we might expect, Jesus ignores her and says "not a word in answer to her." Then he tells his disciples that he "was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

Jesus makes that point even more sharply by saying, "It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs."

Having Jesus ignore a mother pleading for her daughter, and then have Jesus compare the woman and her tormented daughter to dogs, does not convey a positive image of Jesus. At the least, his words are not very sensitive.

The fact that this story appears, despite its negative portrayal of Jesus, is an indication of the impression it made on the disciples.

Matthew included Jesus' encounter with the Canaanite woman not just because it happened but because the incident teaches us some important lessons.

It teaches us that like Jesus, our compassion has to extend beyond the members of our family, our Church, and our group. It has to extend to all in need, even those we might label "dogs" in the private recesses of our minds.

It teaches us that prejudice and hatred of the stranger are terrible things. Perhaps Jesus acted as he did precisely to show us just how much such attitudes contradict our Christian faith.

It teaches us that like Jesus, we have to be open to the Spirit of God who may be calling us to change our thinking and our ways of acting.

And finally, it teaches us that deep faith in God can be found in the most unlikely of people. In Sunday's Gospel, Jesus ends up extolling the faith of that pleading mother, "O woman, great is your faith!"

We certainly can understand why Matthew might have chosen to exclude this Sunday's account of Jesus and the Canaanite woman. But if Matthew did, we would have been deprived of a story that challenges our thinking and the limits we often put on God's love.

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