

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, August 20, 2017

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

WAS THAT A FLIP-FLOP?

In the course of political campaigns, candidates use various tactics to attack their opponents and to put them in a negative light.

One common approach is to carefully research all the positions that an opposing candidate has taken over the years to see if those positions have remained constant. For example, has the candidate embraced the same positions on health care, taxes, or immigration or has the candidate changed his or her thinking on any of those issues.

If variations in positions are discovered, the opposing camp claims the candidate has flip-flopped. Negative ads soon appear asserting that the candidate is not to be trusted as his or her positions today may not match what they will be tomorrow.

In this Sunday's Gospel (Matthew 15:21-28), Jesus might be accused of flip-flopping since he completely changes his position on an important issue.

A Canaanite woman, a Gentile, comes to Jesus pleading for his help for her demon-possessed daughter. Jesus refuses her request. He says, "He was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel."

The woman asks a second time. Again Jesus says "no" to her request and rather emphatically. "It is not right to take the food of the children and throw it to the dogs."

Even after this derogatory response, the woman asks yet a third time. "Please, Lord, for even the dogs eat the scraps that fall from the table of their masters." This time Jesus agrees to help and her daughter is healed.

In that encounter with a distraught mother, Jesus changed his position. Initially Jesus saw his mission as restricted to his fellow Jews, but he broadened it to embrace Gentiles as well.

Jesus flip-flopped since he grew in his appreciation of his mission. This evolution in understanding is something that can also be seen earlier in the life of Jesus. In his Gospel, Luke tells us that after the 12-year-old Jesus was found in the Temple by Mary and Joseph, he returned home and "advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man." (Luke 2:52)

Growth in wisdom, understanding, and age was part of the life of Jesus and such growth should be a continuing part of every human life. A person who never changes his or her mind, a person who never flip-flops, is a person whose psychological and spiritual growth is stunted.

Jesus changed his mind and he certainly expects his followers to be open to having their minds changed for the better, and open to the Spirit of God leading them in new directions. After all, the entire mission of Jesus was about challenging people to change their minds and hearts and to embrace the Kingdom of God.

Politicians who are not open to changing their ideas and opinions do not make the best candidates, and believers who are not open to growing in wisdom and understanding do not make the best of Christians.

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