

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, August 21, 2016

The Twenty First 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.

ENTITLED TO HEAVEN

We live at a time where there is an increasing sense of entitlement in society. People believe they are entitled to food, housing, public education from pre-Kindergarten through college, health care, prescription drugs, a job, family leave, retirement income, unemployment benefits, disability payments, legal representation, phone service, connection to the Internet, and more. If individuals cannot provide those things for themselves, then they expect the government to supply them.

While people can debate the wisdom of providing the services and programs just mentioned, there is little doubt that a sense of entitlement has grown over the years.

That sense of entitlement even affects religion.

Some years ago people felt they had to work at gaining a place in the kingdom of heaven. Those who wished to be numbered among the saved were expected to keep the commandments of God, to follow the teachings of Jesus, to faithfully attend Mass each Sunday and holy day, to receive the sacraments, to say their morning and evening prayers, to see to the religious education of their children, to follow the moral guidance of the Church, to support their local parish, to perform acts of sacrifice during the season of Lent, etc.

Today, that sense of earning one's salvation has certainly diminished. Sunday Mass attendance has dropped dramatically. The number of baptisms and church weddings has decreased. Many parents no longer make certain their children receive the sacraments and attend programs of religious education. Parish membership, support, and involvement have all declined. The values of Catholics have largely become like those of the rest of society.

Of course many reasons can be offered to explain these trends, but perhaps the simplest might be this. Many Christians simply feel they are entitled to salvation and a place in the kingdom of heaven. They do not have to do anything.

If God loves us, if God is all good, if God is merciful, then God will not condemn anyone. What a person does or does not do ultimately makes little difference.

Yet in this Sunday's Gospel (Luke 13:22-30), Jesus makes it clear that those who think that way, who think they are entitled to a place in the kingdom of heaven are deluding themselves.

When Jesus is asked, "Lord, will only a few people be saved?" he gives no number, but instead he says, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough." Jesus certainly implies that it takes effort and work to enter the kingdom. The gate is not wide open.

Jesus then goes on to say that those who only have a casual, passing acquaintance with him – those who call themselves Christians and define for themselves what that means – will find themselves on the other side of door of the kingdom. They will not be recognized by him. “I do not know where you are from. Depart from me you evildoers.”

Yes, God loves us, but God expects a response from us. God expects us to live as followers of Jesus Christ and faithful members of his Church.

If salvation were something to which we were all entitled, why would Jesus have told his disciples, “Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.” (Matthew 28: 19-20)

Jesus would have simply sent his disciples to distribute free passes to heaven!

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