

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, August 23, 2015

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.

THOSE WHO WALK AWAY

When the President gives his State of the Union address each January, one thing is certain. The members of Congress who belong to the same political party as the President will loudly and enthusiastically applaud each proposal he puts forward. Those belonging to the opposition will usually greet those same proposals with stony silence.

Democrats support a President from their party and Republicans do the same for a President who shares their political philosophy. It would be unexpected and certainly newsworthy if those of the President's own political party reacted with deafening silence and with looks of disapproval.

In this Sunday's Gospel (John 6:60-69), many people do not react as would be expected.

When Jesus finishes speaking about himself as the "living bread that came down from heaven," many people react with disbelief and disapproval. "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"

While we would have expected those who were critical of Jesus to respond in that way, we would have assumed that his followers, who had just seen Jesus feed thousands with a few loaves and fish, would have accepted his teaching.

Instead we are told that many of the disciples of Jesus reacted negatively. Instead of applauding their teacher, they were murmuring about his message. "Who can accept it?"

As a result of the words that Jesus spoke "many of his disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him." Jesus was abandoned by a good number of his disciples. That may have been a surprise to his apostles, yet apparently not to Jesus. He knew that his message would be rejected by many. As John tells us in his Gospel, "Jesus knew from the beginning the ones who would not believe."

Today many disciples of Jesus also walk away from him. They no longer gather with their fellow Christians to hear his word proclaimed and preached. They consider his voice just one voice among many vying for attention. They see the Eucharist as something far less than his very Body and Blood and not worth their attendance at Mass. They allow their moral standards to be set by a changing society with fluid definitions of right and wrong. They forget that the Cross of Jesus calls us to sacrifice for others and to put the will of God before our own.

Many Christians are walking away from Jesus since they find his teachings increasingly hard to accept and to live out in a society that keeps sinking deeper into sin, self-centeredness, consumerism, and immorality. A society that Pope Francis describes as having a "throwaway culture" where all things are considered disposable even the unborn, the poor, the powerless, the elderly, and the sick.

The more our society becomes post-Christian, the more it becomes secular, materialistic, narcissistic, and addicted to sensual pleasure, the more the teachings of Jesus and of his Church seem out of step and suited for another age.

As this happens, some people who claim to be Christians do the unexpected. Like many of the disciples of Jesus in Sunday's Gospel, they walk away. They no longer accompany Jesus. They decide to embrace the values of the society around them and reject those of Jesus Christ.

In the face of such faithlessness, may we never forget what Peter told Jesus when he was asked if he would also leave, "Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and are convinced that you are the Holy One of God."

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