

# **LOOKING TO SUNDAY®**

**Sunday, August 24, 2025**

## ***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.

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

### **DECREASING ATTENDANCE**

Fewer Catholics are going to Sunday Mass. That fact is verified by statistical studies, and we can see it for ourselves. There are less people in the pews.

Several reasons have been suggested for this drop in attendance including: the escalating secularization in society, the movement away from organized religion, a growing lack of belief in God or in anything beyond the material world, the damage done by the scandals that rocked the Church, the lingering effects of the recent pandemic when physical attendance at Mass was replaced by online viewing, increasing individualism and relativism that devalue community and objective truth, and preaching that at times seems disconnected from everyday life.

However, there may be another reason why fewer people are going to Sunday Mass. In continually emphasizing God's boundless mercy and forgiveness, the Church may inadvertently be conveying the message that what a person does or does not do is of little consequence. If God forgives everything, why bother observing the law of the Church requiring attendance at Mass every Sunday and holyday of obligation or obeying any of the commandments or the instructions of Jesus?

To put it another way, if everyone passes or gets an "A," why bother going to class, completing the assignments, or even introducing yourself to the professor?

Yet in this Sunday's Gospel (Luke 13:22-30), Jesus reminds us that God's mercy is paired with judgement. When asked how many people will be saved, how many people will be given a place in the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus does not tell us to just trust in God's mercy. 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."

That narrow gate is Jesus. As he tells us in the Gospel of John, "I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture" (John 10:9).

Jesus then warns us that entering through the "narrow gate" demands more than having a passing association with him. He speaks about the master of a house who rejects those who felt they knew him because they ate and drank in his company. Jesus tells us that the master will say to such people, "I do not know where you are from. Depart from me you evil doers!"

We enter through the narrow gate when we spend time with Jesus in prayer and live according to his teachings found in the scriptures and proclaimed by his Church,

We enter through the narrow gate when we demonstrate our love for Jesus by caring for the hungry, the hurting, and the powerless, for as he told us, "Whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

And we walk through that narrow gate when we gather with our fellow Catholics to fulfill the command of Jesus to share his life-giving Body and Blood in memory of him. As he warned us, "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you" (John 6:53).

As we emphasize the mercy and compassion of God, we also need to remember that Jesus never reveals how many people will be saved. Instead, he tells us, "Strive to enter through the narrow gate, for many, I tell you, will attempt to enter but will not be strong enough." For us as Catholics, that striving includes going to Sunday Mass.

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