

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, August 30, 2020

The Twenty-Second 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 eleven years.

PLANNING TO RETIRE

Those who check their Social Security statements, who put a portion of their income into IRA accounts, who invest in mutual funds and annuities, who estimate the future cost of living, who research continuing care communities, who are knowledgeable about Medicare and other forms of health coverage, who exercise daily and avoid unhealthy behaviors, are people who want to be prepared for the future that awaits them when they retire.

But people who are certain they will never make it to retirement because of a family history of early death, a serious illness, a damaging lifestyle, or some other negative factor, are not concerned with preparing for the future. Why bother? They do not see themselves making it to 65.

A similar attitude may also be impacting religion. Many people are falling away from the practice of their Catholic Faith. Mass attendance is dropping as are the number of weddings, baptisms, first communions, and confirmations.

Various explanations have been proposed to account for this decrease in religious practice. It is thought that some people are negatively influenced by a society and a media that place little value on religious practice. Others are disillusioned with religion because of sexual and financial scandals. Others walk away because they disagree with the Church's moral teachings regarding abortion, family life, and sexual matters. And still others, whose faith formation stopped at first communion, put aside their faith because they think of it as something for children.

But there may be another reason, a more significant reason, to account for this decrease in religious practice. Many people simply no longer believe there is anything waiting for them when life ends. There is no "eternal retirement" for which to prepare. That being the case, why bother to follow the Gospel, to live as a faithful Catholic, or to attend Mass. Why bother to "invest" in a future that will never come?

Yet throughout the Gospels, Jesus proclaims there is a future that follows death. What happens in that future depends on what we have done to prepare for it.

Jesus makes that point once again in this Sunday's Gospel (Matthew 16:21-27). He tells us that "the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory, and then he will repay all according to his conduct."

The conduct that leads to a place of joy in the kingdom of heaven consists in living according to the example given to us by Jesus. As he tells us, "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

In our Second Reading (Romans 12:1-2), Paul warns us not to be misled by a society that teaches us to live only for the moment. He tells us, “Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.”

Jesus obviously lived that way. That is why he could embrace suffering and the cross. When Peter was shocked by this behavior, Jesus told him, “You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do.”

This Sunday, we are reminded that people of faith believe in a future beyond death. People of faith prepare for a “retirement” that lasts forever in the kingdom of heaven.

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