

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, August 31, 2014

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.

THE TRULY SUCCESSFUL PERSON

There is one adjective that most of society would use to describe the following people: Mark Zuckerberg, Beyoncé Knowles, Derek Jeter, Oprah Winfrey, Bill Gates, Barbara Walters, Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Janet Yellen.

That adjective is successful.

We might not like all those people. We might disagree with the politics of some and disapprove of the behavior of others. But we cannot deny that society sees them as successful in their particular fields of business, sports, politics, or entertainment.

Society judges people as successful according to their influence, their celebrity, their power, their wealth, their talent, and their social status.

In this Sunday's Gospel (Matthew 16:21-27), Peter and Jesus have a serious disagreement about what it means to be successful.

A few verses earlier Jesus had asked his disciples who they thought he was. Peter had proclaimed Jesus to be the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

When he said that Jesus was the Christ, the Messiah, Peter had a definite understanding of what the Messiah was supposed to do.

The Messiah was to drive out the despised Roman occupiers, liberate the nation, usher in a time of peace and prosperity, and restore the Kingdom of David to greatness. Doing such things would make Jesus a successful Messiah.

Yet Jesus had a very different understanding of his role and mission. As the Gospel tells us, "Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer greatly from the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed and on the third day be raised."

When Peter objects to the idea of Jesus being such a Messiah, Jesus tells him, "You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

Jesus then concludes by telling his disciples how they are to live, "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."

The words of Jesus make it very clear that God judges success differently than we do.

Those who are successful Christians are those who willingly share their blessings with the hungry and the hurting; who offer their time and talent to serve others; who put God's will before their own; who endure the scorn of a materialistic, pleasure-obsessed society; who value honesty and integrity more than power and advancement; who are unashamed to

express their Catholic faith; and who remain hopeful despite the setbacks of life for they trust God is with them.

As Peter discovered, God's criteria for judging who is successful in life is not the same as ours. We see that dramatically illustrated by the cross of Christ. What looked like the Messiah's final defeat has become the sign of his ultimate success!

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