

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, September 4, 2016

The Twenty Third 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.

MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS

Every organization has requirements that members are expected to fulfill. Those requirements are explained to prospective members so they will clearly understand what will be required if they join.

Imagine for a moment there was an organization that had the following requirements for membership:

1. Members must hate their parents, their spouses, their children, their siblings, and even themselves.
2. Members must be willingly to accept any sacrifice that comes with being part of the group.
3. Members must renounce all their worldly possessions.

Those requirements would probably keep most people from joining or from even attending an informational meeting of such an organization.

Yet those are the requirements Jesus sets forth in this Sunday's Gospel (Luke 14:25-33).

Jesus tells the large crowd listening to his words and traveling with him that a person cannot be his disciple "without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life." He then continues, "Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple." Finally he adds, "Anyone of you who does not renounce all his possessions cannot be my disciple."

Using very dramatic language to make his point, Jesus announces what is expected of those who wish to go from being part of a curious crowd intrigued by his words to being a disciple.

To understand his words we need to consider the following.

Jesus did not expect those who wished to follow him to literally hate their family members. After all he did not hate his own mother and his preaching emphasized love of others. But Jesus did expect his disciples to value their relationship with him above all others. When making decisions disciples were to be guided not by others or even by their own self-interest, but rather by his words and example. "Love one another as I love you." (John 15:12)

Jesus expected a disciple to be ready to bear his or her cross. Perhaps not one made of timber but the crosses of sacrifice and suffering that would come with being known as his follower. Certainly in our world where Gospel values and moral standards are seen as relics of some unenlightened past and the will of the individual reigns supreme, Christians are more and more scorned and ridiculed and even put to death. As Jesus made clear, discipleship comes at a cost.

Jesus required that disciples renounce their possessions. Jesus knew that money and possessions, and the desire for more and more, could draw people away from him. As happened in the case of the rich man who was unable to say *yes* to Jesus because he could not say *no* to his possessions. “‘Go, sell what you have, and give to [the] poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.’ At that statement his face fell, and he went away sad, for he had many possessions.” (Mark 10:21, 22)

Disciples begin to renounce their possessions when they recognize the control that things have over them. Just consider the amount of time we spend making money and worrying about money, the quantity of stuff in our closets and storage compartments, the value of our digital and electronic devices, and the total we spend on leisure activities and restaurant visits. Then compare those numbers to the amount of our charitable giving to the Church and to those who seek our help. That comparison reveals if we are renouncing our possessions or if they are possessing us. As Jesus said, “You cannot serve God and mammon.” (Luke 16:13)

But before we are willing to accept those demands that Jesus requires of his disciples, we first need to appreciate the value of having a personal relationship with him and knowing him as our Savior and Lord. Until that happens we will be like the crowd in the Gospel – willing to listen to the words of Jesus that please us, but unwilling to do what is required to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ.

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