

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, September 7, 2025

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.

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

LOVE ME, HATE THEM

"You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself". That was the answer that Jesus gave when asked which commandment in the law was the greatest.

Yet Jesus seems to contradict that answer in this Sunday's Gospel (Luke 14:25-33). Jesus says that no one can be one of his disciples "without hating his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and even his own life."

These words of Jesus seem incompatible with his command to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. Jesus seems to be saying if we are to follow him then we must hate others, even the members of our family and even our own lives.

Yet as we know, Jesus did not hate the members of his family. He loved Mary and Joseph and was obedient to them. He was moved to act by Mary's concern for the newly married couple at Cana. And as he hung upon the cross on Good Friday, he lovingly placed his mother Mary into the care and safe keeping of John the apostle.

Jesus also loved his disciples. They were like family. "And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matthew 12:49-50).

When Jesus speaks of hating others, Jesus is not speaking of rejecting others, closing our hearts to them, or treating them with disdain. Jesus is using dramatic language to make a point.

As William Barclay, the noted scripture scholar, once wrote, "We must not take Jesus' words with cold and unimaginative literalness. Eastern language is always as vivid as the human mind can make it. When Jesus tells us to hate our nearest and dearest, he does not mean that literally. He means that no love in life can compare with the love we must bear to him."

In dramatic language, Jesus is teaching us that God must be the priority in our lives, just as it was for him. As Jesus told us, "I came down from heaven not to do my own will but the will of the one who sent me" (John 6:38).

Jesus is telling us if we wish to follow him, we need to let God have first place in our lives. We cannot value any other relationship, or anything else more than our relationship with the Lord. All else must be "hated," put second.

We learn how to put God first in our lives by looking at Jesus, listening to his words and following his example.

We learn how to put God first by listening to the guidance of the Church, learning from the example of faithful Christians, and opening ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We learn how to put God first by gathering with our fellow Christians for the celebration of the Mass. There we encourage each other, and there the One who is to be first in our lives physically comes to us as we share his life-giving Body and Blood.

If we let God have first place in our lives and let God guide our decisions and actions, then we will become the good and holy people God made us to be.

When God is first in our lives, everything else falls into its proper place.

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