

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, September 8, 2019

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 ten years.

ARE LAWS ENOUGH?

What brings about positive change in society? What makes things better?

Many people might answer by saying that good laws bring needed improvement.

For example, they might say if we want to lower incidents of gun violence, our congressional representatives need to pass stricter gun laws.

If we want to end bullying in our schools, those in charge of our educational system need to enact additional laws and regulations governing student behavior.

If we want to stop the horror of human trafficking, then state and federal officials need to write laws that will thwart those involved in the buying and selling of human beings.

But laws alone may not be the answer to those problems and to the other ills that plague our society.

In this Sunday's Second Reading (Philemon 9-10, 12-17) taken from Saint Paul's shortest and most personal of all his letters, we see him dealing with the issue of slavery.

Paul writes to Philemon, a fellow Christian, interceding on behalf of Onesimus, Philemon's runaway slave whom Paul had converted to Christianity. Onesimus had become Paul's helper and friend, but still Paul felt obligated to send him back to his master. That was the law and slavery was an accepted institution at the time.

In his letter Paul does not urge Philemon and Onesimus to join him in a campaign to change Roman law regarding slavery.

Instead, he asks Philemon to do something even more radical. He asks Philemon to look upon Onesimus in a new way. "No longer as a slave but more than a slave, a brother, beloved especially to me, but even more so to you, as a man and in the Lord."

Paul called upon Philemon to recognize the radically new relationship he had with his runaway slave. Onesimus was not to be considered a piece of property but a fellow child of God, a brother for whom Christ died.

Paul did not call for a change of law, but for a change of heart.

While laws can help to improve our society, perhaps true improvement only happens when people begin to see one another in a new way, as fellow children of God.

That is what Saint Paul challenged Philemon to do, and that is what he challenges us to do as well. Paul would tell us, "See the people around you as fellow children of God and treat them as your brothers and sisters. Change your vision!"

If we do that, society will change for the better.

2019 Rev. Thomas B. Iwanowski