

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, September 9, 2018

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.

SELECTIVE CONDITIONS

No person would choose to be deaf, to be unable to hear the voices of people or the beauty of music.

No person would choose to be mute, to be unable to verbally communicate ideas, needs, and feelings.

In this Sunday's Gospel (Mark 7:31-37), we meet a man who is described as deaf and suffering a speech impediment – two handicaps he did not wish for himself.

His neighbors bring the man to Jesus and beg Jesus to cure him. Jesus touches the man's ears and tongue and commands them to be opened. And they are! The man begins to hear and to speak plainly.

There is no doubt, the man would never want to return to his former condition. Why would he choose to be deaf? Why would he choose to be unable to speak?

But many of us make exactly those choices.

There are times we choose not to hear. For example, many people who are politically on the right readily listen to Fox News, but they are deaf to what is said on MSNBC.

And the opposite is equally the case. Those on the left shut their ears to Sean Hannity and Laura Ingraham and hang on the words spoken by Rachel Maddow and Joe Scarborough.

There are also times when we choose not to speak. For example, we open our mouths to express our outrage when we feel our rights are violated. But our speech suddenly becomes impaired when individuals or groups that we dislike face discrimination and unjust treatment. We say nothing.

Selective deafness and selective speech impairment also happen in our spiritual lives.

We listen to the Words of the Gospel and the teachings of the Church that affirm us and do not challenge our way of living.

But we are often deaf to the prophets who call us to support the rights of immigrants, to care for the environment, to defend the unborn child, to combat society's addiction to pornography, to shun the racism and prejudices that negatively affect certain groups, and to stand against the media's portrayal of marriage, gender, and sexual activity.

We have no problem with our tongue when we are in Church. It works fine. We pray, we sing, we profess our faith, we offer our petitions, we speak of peace and justice. Holy words, loving words, saintly words flow freely at Mass.

But often such words do not come so freely outside the doors of the church. We become tongue-tied, our speech becomes impaired. We do not mention our faith in our conversations with co-workers, neighbors, and friends. We do not speak in favor of laws and policies that are in line with the Gospel and oppose those that relativize truth and morality. We do not call the evil we see evil for fear of offending or being labeled a religious bigot. We do not speak words of prayer in public and sometimes not even within our homes.

We need to call upon the Lord to touch our hearts, our ears, and our lips. We need him to give us courage. We need him to say to us what he says to the man in this Sunday's Gospel, "*Ephphatha!*" — "Be opened!"

The Lord does not want followers who are spiritually deaf or spiritually speech-impaired!

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