

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, September 10, 2017

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

BEYOND ANGER

What is the first thing you do when someone you know deliberately hurts or offends you?

For most of us, our first response is anger or perhaps confusion, disappointment, or surprise. We respond in a negative way. We might even lash out at the person.

The next thing we tend to do is to tell a friend what that person has done, how terribly that individual has treated us.

Then we might tell a second person, a third person, and perhaps even others. When someone does something hurtful or cruel, we usually do not keep the incident to ourselves. "You won't believe what she did, what he did!"

In telling our friends and acquaintances, we get confirmation that we were treated badly and that the other person acted terribly. Of course, the more we retell the story the more we relive what occurred, the greater our resentment grows, and the gulf between us and the other person widens – sometimes never to close.

In this Sunday's Gospel (Matthew 18:15-20), Jesus tells us to take another approach, especially when we are hurt by a member of the Christian community.

Jesus says, "If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone." Jesus tells us to approach the person who has hurt us and to try and resolve the situation. Keeping the incident between ourselves and the other person prevents stories from spreading and sides being taken.

If that does not resolve the situation, Jesus says to go back to the person who has hurt us, but this time with one or two other members of the faith community.

We are to do this not to "gang up" on the other person, but rather to allow those others to offer their perspectives and perhaps to act as mediators. In that small group, the healing presence of Jesus might make itself felt. For as Jesus tells us, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

If this fails to bring about reconciliation, then we are to tell the church. Of course, this does mean involving the entire parish, but it may mean bringing the matter to respected parish leaders. We are to seek their help as we try to resolve the issue between us and the other person.

If all fails, Jesus tells us to treat the person who has hurt us "as you would a Gentile or a tax collector." While we might think that means cutting ourselves off from the other person, we need to realize that Jesus made a point of reaching out to such people. He ate with tax

collectors and sinners, as he did in the case of Zacchaeus, and he called the tax collector Matthew to follow him. In other words, if all else fails, don't give up.

This is what God does when it comes to us. We certainly offend the Lord by our sins and failures. Yet God keeps reaching out to us. God never gives up on us, that is why he sent his Son as our Lord and Redeemer.

While it is understandable that we would become angry with those who hurt us and tell others how we were treated, doing so does nothing to resolve the situation. It makes matters worse and it weakens the Christian community.

Sunday's Gospel challenges us never to give up when it comes to trying to restore relationships. We need to bind ourselves to the Lord's way of dealing with hurts and to loose ourselves from the world's way of anger, gossip, and resentment. "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

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