

# **LOOKING TO SUNDAY®**

**Sunday, September 16, 2018**

## ***The Twenty-Fourth 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.

### **A GLOBE NOT A CROSS**

There is a popular Christian televangelist who delivers his message on a stage adorned with a large, stylized globe that continually revolves during the service.

The only other object on the stage is a podium. There is no cross anywhere in sight.

This cross-less scene seems to be in keeping with the message that is preached each week. A message that assures all those listening that God is waiting to bless believers with success and prosperity. They just need to have faith in themselves and faith in God's wonderful vision for them.

That kind of cross-less Christianity is apparently what Peter expected. In this Sunday's Gospel (Mark 8:27-35), Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" After hearing the views of the public, Jesus asks his disciples their opinion. Without hesitation, Peter responds, "You are the Christ."

But when Jesus begins to teach his disciples that he would suffer greatly, be rejected, and killed, Peter takes Jesus aside to "rebuke him." Peter criticizes and reproaches Jesus. A suffering Christ, a rejected Messiah, is not what Peter has in mind.

Rather than altering his words, Jesus goes on to say that his followers must deny themselves and take up their cross. They must focus not on their personal success and ambition but on living according to his example. As Jesus says, "whoever loses his life for my sake and that of the gospel will save it."

A cross-less Christianity is not what Jesus had in mind. The very structure of the cross reminds us of the two essential aspects that come with following Christ.

The vertical dimension of the cross proclaims that followers of Christ are to focus their attention on God and to grow in their relationship with him. That happens through prayer, through the reading of scripture, through Sunday Mass, and by being faithful members of the Church.

The horizontal dimension of the cross reminds us that followers of Christ are to show their faith by works of compassion, charity, and sacrifice. They are to be as concerned for others as they are with their relationship with God.

As James tells us in Sunday's Second Reading (James 2:14-18), "If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and has no food for the day, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,' but you do not give them the necessities of the body, what good is it? So also faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead."

Faith that leads us to lift up our hearts in praise of God and faith that leads us to reach out to those in need are both required. Together they make up the cross we are to take up as followers of Christ.

There is no such thing as a cross-less Christianity. Christianity is not meant to revolve around us.

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