

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, September 18, 2016

The Twenty Fifth 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.

WHAT IS YOUR CONCERN?

When an employee is about to lose his or her job at a large company the following events usually take place. Without advance notice, the employee is summoned to the Human Resources Department. There the employee meets with the head of the department, who generally has another person present to witness the proceedings. The employee is informed that his or her employment is terminated and then is given an explanation of any benefits and severance to which he or she is entitled.

The employee is then escorted back to the work place to gather any personal items. The employee is immediately locked out of access to any of the company's computers, files, and data. Key cards and passwords that worked minutes ago are now invalid. With personal items in hand, the terminated employee is then walked out of the building.

Companies follow such procedures to avoid emotional scenes, to lessen any chance of litigation, and to prevent terminated employees from stealing any data, sabotaging a current project or causing any damage out of anger at being let go.

In this Sunday's Gospel (Luke 16:1-13), Jesus tells a parable about the termination of an employee. In the story a large landowner is informed that his steward, his business manager, has been squandering his property. Rather than looking out for the interests of the master, the business manager has been looking out for his own welfare and has been lining his pockets with his master's wealth.

The master tells the steward he is fired. But rather than escorting him out the door or having him thrown in jail, the master says, "Prepare a full account of your stewardship, because you can no longer be my steward."

The master sends the steward back to his office to prepare a report. And there the steward continues to do what he had been doing. He squanders more of his master's wealth by immediately calling in the master's debtors and having them write out new promissory notes with substantial reductions in their debts.

When the master discovers what his terminated employee has done, he does a surprising, shocking thing. The master commends the steward. Certainly not for his ongoing dishonesty, but rather for the clever way the steward devised to continue to put his interests above those of his master. As Jesus says, "the master commended that dishonest steward for acting prudently."

By lowering the amount each debtor owed his master that dishonest steward accomplished several things. He won the good will of the debtors. He made them his accomplices. He

provided for his future. At the same time, he put the master in a position where he could not do much about the situation.

If the master demanded the original amounts in payment, he would look miserly and mean since the debtors were most likely praising the generosity he had shown them through his business manager. Furthermore, if the master accused the business manager of acting wrongfully in lowering the debts, he would look foolish. The master was the one who allowed his employee to return to his position after telling him he was fired. The master did not walk him out the door.

In all that he did, that employee, that steward, was motivated by self-concern. He served himself and not his master. His effort, energy, and ingenuity were directed to assuring his position in life and his financial prosperity.

Jesus tells us that we cannot be like him. Our effort, energy, and ingenuity have to be directed not to serving only our interests, not to putting financial success above all else. Rather our effort, energy, and ingenuity have to be directed to serving God, living the Gospel and thus assuring that we “will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.” That has to be our first self-concern.

As Jesus puts it, “No servant can serve two masters. He will either hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon.”

The business manager chose mammon. He chose his financial prosperity as his primary concern. Jesus challenges us to make a better, a wiser choice!

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