

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, September 20, 2015

This email, entitled Looking to Sunday®, focuses on the Gospel Reading 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 TEACHER'S FRUSTRATION

Being a teacher can be frustrating. It is no easy task for a teacher to impart information and understanding to a group of students, especially if some of those students are less than receptive or attentive. When the final exam comes, a teacher may discover that many students failed to grasp the material. What was taught was not understood.

In this Sunday's Gospel (Mark 9:30-37), Jesus might have felt like a frustrated teacher for the lesson he was trying to impart was missed by his students, by his disciples. Jesus was teaching them that suffering and death awaited him in Jerusalem. "The Son of Man is to be handed over to men and they will kill him, and three days after his death the Son of Man will rise." Jesus was not going to be the long-awaited Messiah who would free the people from the yoke of Rome and restore the Kingdom of Israel.

Yet his disciples misunderstood or dismissed what Jesus was teaching. Rather than realizing that what awaited their master would touch their own lives, they began to argue about "who was the greatest." Jesus was speaking about suffering and service and their minds were on position and greatness in the kingdom that they expected him to establish.

So what did Jesus do? He taught the lesson even more forcefully.

The Gospel tells us that Jesus "sat down, called the Twelve, and said to them, 'If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all.'" In sitting down, Jesus took the traditional posture of a teacher at the time. A teacher sat and the students gathered around to listen.

In that teaching position, Jesus forcefully restated his point that those who are great in God's kingdom are not those who achieve positions of power and fame, but rather those who bend down to serve the poor and the powerless.

Then like a good teacher, Jesus not only conveyed that lesson in words, he also gave a visual example of his message. Jesus took a child, a person with no rights, no status, and no importance in the society of his day, and he embraced that child. Then Jesus told his disciples that in serving a lowly child they came in contact with God himself. "Whoever receives one child such as this in my name, receives me; and whoever receives me, receives not me but the One who sent me."

The disciples of Jesus could find greatness just as he did, by reaching out and serving the poor, the powerless, the weak, the unimportant, the rejected, the lonely, the sick, and the aged. In our day, we have a wonderful example of a disciple achieving such greatness in Pope Francis. His words of mercy and his acts of humble service have caught the attention of the world.

In this Sunday's Gospel Jesus gives us a lesson that we often fail to grasp. How many of us, if we were asked to describe the path to success in life, would answer with the words of Jesus our teacher, "If anyone wishes to be first, he shall be the last of all and the servant of all."

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