

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, September 24, 2017

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

GOD IS NOT LIKE US

Today, an increasing number of people do not believe in the existence of God. Others believe that God exists but do not accept that Supreme Being cares about them in an individual, personal way. For them, God is just a disinterested observer who watches as the universe he created whirls through the vastness of space and time.

How, such people ask, can there be a loving God when hunger and poverty devastate nations; when wars, terrorism, and violence snuff out innocent lives; when earthquakes, droughts, hurricanes, and other natural disasters cause untold amounts of human suffering?

How can there be a compassionate Supreme Being when ethnic, religious, cultural, and economic rivalries turn people against each other; when cancer, heart disease, addiction, dementia, mental illness and other maladies destroy the bodies and minds of millions; and when wicked, selfish, immoral individuals prosper while bad things happen to those who seek to do good?

If there were a caring God, that God would certainly do something to alleviate human pain and suffering. God would not allow the power of evil to have its way. Since that is not the case, non-believers conclude there is no God, certainly no God of kindness and compassion.

That kind of reasoning assumes that God has to act as we would act if we were God. If we believe that we would bring an end to hunger, if we would punish those responsible for war and human suffering, if we would answer any prayer for healing, then we assume God must do the same.

However, God does not always act as we would act. As God tells us in this Sunday's First Reading from the Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 55:6-9), "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the LORD. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts."

God does not behave as we would. Jesus illustrates that in Sunday's Gospel (Matthew 20:1-16). There Jesus speaks of a landowner who hires workers throughout the course of a day to labor in his vineyard. Some laborers end up working 12 hours, others nine hours, others six hours, others three hours, and still others a single hour. Yet at the end of the day, the landowner instructs his foreman to pay all the workers the same amount. From our point of view that behavior is unjust. Those who worked in the vineyard all day should obviously get more than those who arrived just 60 minutes before quitting time.

But the landowner does as he wishes and so does God. God does not have to act according to our expectations any more than the landowner had to act according to the expectations of his workers.

God is all good, all caring, all merciful, and all just, but how and when God shows those qualities is God's choice. God does not have to act as we would. God does not have to prove anything to us.

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