

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, September 25, 2016

The Twenty Sixth 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.

NOT THE OBVIOUS ANSWER

Sometimes the obvious answer to a question is not always the correct or the best response. For example, if a group of people were asked how the president of the United States is chosen, the obvious answer is "by the vote of the people." Voters cast their ballots and the person who receives the greatest number of votes on Election Day becomes the president.

However, that obvious answer is not correct. While voters may think they are casting their ballots for a particular candidate, they are actually voting for slates of electors pledged to particular candidates. These 538 electors cast their ballots which are then sent to Washington DC where they are officially counted before a joint session of Congress in early January. The person receiving 270 or more electoral votes then becomes the president.

In this Sunday's Gospel (Luke 16:19-31), we hear about "a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day." While he enjoyed the good life, he completely ignored Lazarus, the poor beggar lying at door, who was "covered with sores, who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man's table."

Both died. The rich man ended up in the fires of hell while Lazarus found joy in heaven with Abraham. From his place in hell the rich man pleaded with Abraham to "send him [Lazarus] to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he may warn them, lest they too come to this place of torment."

After hearing that Gospel, if we were asked how many brothers the rich man had, the apparent answer would be five. He had five brothers about whom he was very concerned. He did not want those five men to end up like him.

Five seems the obvious answer; it was certainly the answer that the rich man himself would have given. However, the correct answer is six. The rich man had another brother – it was Lazarus.

The reason the rich man was condemned to a place of torment was because he was blind to that sixth brother, blind to his relationship with Lazarus. He did not recognize him as a part of the family of Abraham and as a fellow child of God. If he had, the rich man would have shown Lazarus the care and concern he had for his other five brothers.

Jesus tells the story of the rich man and Lazarus to challenge us to care for the hungry, the hurting, the sick, the lonely, the suffering, the stranger, the poor, and the forgotten, who are outside the doors of our homes and the doors of our hearts.

But we will only respond to those in need when we recognize our relationship with them, when we see them as part of our human family, and recognize our responsibility to them.

One way to begin to do that is to make an effort to notice that “sixth brother,” that “sixth sister,” whom we usually fail to see as we go through our day. If the rich man had truly recognized this “sixth brother,” he would not have passed him by.

It is only when we see our “sixth brother or sister” that we will act with the mercy and compassion we are to show as followers of Jesus Christ.

Each day God calls us to realize that we all have one more brother, one more sister than we realize. The obvious answer is not always the right answer!

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