

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, September 29, 2019

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.

Looking to Sunday has been published for more than ten years.

SEEING THE SUFFERING

On September 1, Hurricane Dorian hit the Bahamas. That Category Five storm caused tremendous devastation, left 70,000 people homeless, injured thousands, and produced a still rising death toll.

Reports of that natural disaster and images of the suffering caused by Hurricane Dorian filled every news program and trended across social media.

Those images from the Bahamas elicited a variety of reactions. Some people were shocked by the sheer destructive power of nature. Others were moved to feel sympathy for those affected. Others were motivated to pray for the victims and to thank God they themselves were spared such suffering. And others may have had their attention captured for a few days, but soon found another interest.

However, there were other people, many thousands of others, who were so moved by what they saw that they took action.

They made financial contributions. They donated water, food, clothing, tents and construction supplies and equipment. They arranged for the use of planes and boats to ship supplies. And some volunteered to go to the Bahamas in order to personally assist those affected.

Everyone saw images of the suffering caused by Hurricane Dorian, but not everyone acted. Seeing was not enough.

That holds true in this Sunday's Gospel (Luke 16:19-31). There Jesus tells a story about "a rich man who dressed in purple garments and fine linen and dined sumptuously each day." At that rich man's door was Lazarus, "a poor man ... who would gladly have eaten his fill of the scraps that fell from the rich man's table."

That rich man obviously saw Lazarus, he even knew his name. For as we hear in the story when the rich man is suffering the torments of hell, he recognizes Lazarus. He even refers to him by name when he pleads with Abraham to send Lazarus to ease his sufferings with a few drops of water.

In his life, the rich man did nothing for the sick and starving beggar at his door for he saw no connection between himself and Lazarus. Lazarus was just another part of the scenery.

If the rich man had truly recognized Lazarus as a fellow child of God, a fellow descendant of Abraham, what he saw would not only have caught his eye, it would have tugged at his heart and motivated him to act.

It is that kind of seeing – seeing that touches the heart – that explains why some people are motivated to act when they see suffering people in the media or on their “doorsteps.” Those who act recognize those suffering as being fellow children of God, as part of the human family.

Certainly, one of the things that Jesus came to do was to give us the wisdom to recognize our connection to others. That is the very reason he tells us the parable we hear this Sunday.

Those who see the suffering as their brothers and sisters come to their assistance. Those who see them as just part of the scenery are on their way to joining the rich man of today’s Gospel.

2019 Rev. Thomas B. Iwanowski