

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, October 8, 2017

The Twenty-Seventh 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

CRITICISM – WHO LIKES IT?

No one likes to be criticized.

We don't like people telling us our faults and failings. We don't like people enlightening us about what we did poorly and how we could have done better.

That is especially true when that criticism is expressed in public. It's bad enough when someone privately offers us some "constructive criticism," but when it happens in front of other people, it is even more irritating. Then we get defensive and start attacking our critic. "Who are you to tell me anything?"

However, we have no problem with criticism if that criticism is directed at someone else. And if we don't like the person being spoken about, the more criticism and the more negative, the better.

In this Sunday's Gospel (Matthew 21:33-43), Jesus tells a parable about a person who establishes a vineyard that he leases out to tenants. At harvest time, the owner sends his servants to collect the agreed upon amount of grapes. Those servants are abused and killed by the tenant farmers, and when another group of servants is sent on the same mission, they are also attacked. Those tenants even go so far as to kill the owner's son, thinking in this way they will gain ownership of the vineyard.

We may find that parable easy to listen to since it was directed to other people, not to us. Matthew tells us that Jesus addressed that parable to the chief priests and elders. They were the wicked, greedy, faithless tenants who had failed to care for the vineyard of the Lord, for the people of Israel. They were the religious leaders who had ignored and abused the prophets God had sent to them, and now they were conspiring against Jesus. He was the son in the parable whom they would soon hang on the cross.

In our minds, we can easily apply that parable to the religious leaders that we judge are not acting as they should. We can even expand it to include other types of leaders of whom we are critical.

However, this parable, like all the teachings of Jesus, is also meant for us.

God has given each of us a portion of his vineyard to tend on his behalf.

That vineyard can be the part of this world that is our responsibility: it can be the property we own, the community in which we live, the state where we reside, and the nation we call our homeland. How are we caring for that property that God has "leased" to us for a time? Are we listening to those like Pope Francis who challenge us to be good stewards of God's creation, God's "vineyard"?

God has also given us a place in another vineyard. In the Old Testament, the vineyard represented the Chosen People. As the Prophet Isaiah proclaims in Sunday's First Reading, "The vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel."

For us, the vineyard is the Church. We were given a place in that vineyard at our baptism and we promised we would be good "tenants" who would produce a harvest of goodness. We would live as followers of Jesus, bringing his light, peace, and mercy into this world. Through scriptures, the teachings of Church, and the celebration of the liturgy, we are continually reminded of what our Master expects of us.

Sunday's Gospel contains a parable of criticism originally addressed to the chief priests and elders. But as we hear that parable, we need to realize it has a message for all those given a place in the vineyard of the Lord. It has a message for us!

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