

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, October 9, 2016

The Twenty Eight 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.

WHY ME?

"Why did this happen to me?" When something bad happens in our lives that is one of the first questions that comes to mind.

That is especially true if our doctor tells us that we have a serious, and perhaps even fatal, disease. "Why did this happen to me? I exercise. I don't smoke or take drugs. I watch what I eat. I get enough rest. I avoid stress. I limit my drinking to an occasional glass of wine. I take care of my health."

That question also encompasses our relationship with God. "I pray. I go to Mass on Sunday. I do my best to live as a Christian. I help those in need. I'm involved with my parish. I try to be a good parent, a good spouse, a good son or daughter. Granted I'm not perfect, but I'm no big sinner. So why did this happen to me?"

In this Sunday's Gospel (Luke 17:11-19), we meet ten people stricken with what the reading describes as leprosy. A disease, which according to Jewish law, required that those afflicted be separated from their relatives, friends, and neighbors and live apart with other lepers so as to avoid infecting others.

Those ten people must have asked themselves, "Why did this happen to me?" many times. Perhaps they asked themselves that question several times a day, especially when they saw their healthy neighbors going about their daily lives. "Why did I get leprosy? What did I do that was so terrible? Why is God punishing me?"

Those ten people were united in their questioning, their pain, and in their banishment from their community. Their common suffering and isolation had brought them together. There was even a hated and despised Samaritan among them.

When they heard that Jesus was nearby they cried out from a distance, "Jesus, Master! Have pity on us!" In response, Jesus, the Jewish teacher known for his healing power, tells them, "Go show yourselves to the priests."

On their way, all ten are cured. But only one, a Samaritan, immediately reacts by leaving the rest and returning to Jesus. For him, thanking Jesus was more important than having his healing verified by the priests.

Perhaps the Samaritan acted as he did because when he realized he had been cured he could not believe it. "Why did this happen to me?" He was not a faithful member of the Jewish people like the other nine, but a despised Samaritan, a heretic. He was not the kind of person with whom a Jewish rabbi would have had any contact or concern.

In response to his unexpected, unwarranted healing, the Samaritan “returned, glorifying God in a loud voice; and he fell at the feet of Jesus and thanked him.”

He acted with spontaneous, unrestrained joy and thanks. There was no good reason for what happened to him other than the decision of Jesus to act with mercy, compassion, and love.

When bad things happen to us, we are quick to start asking, “Why did this happen to me?”

Yet when good things, wonderful things, happen in our lives, we usually don’t ask that same question. If we did, we would reach the same conclusion as the Samaritan who was cured of leprosy. There is no good reason for the blessings in our lives, blessings large and small, other than the decision of God to show us mercy, compassion, and love.

Like that Samaritan, who experienced God’s goodness, our response has to be simply one of thankful joy and gratitude. As we are told at every Mass, “Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.” And just as the Samaritan would respond, we proclaim, “It is right and just.”

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