

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, October 16, 2016

The Twenty Ninth 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.

HOW TO WEAKEN FAITH

“What would the devil do to weaken or destroy someone's faith?” That certainly is not the kind of question that we usually consider, but it is worth thinking about in light of this Sunday's Gospel. (Luke 18:1-8)

What would the devil do?

Would the devil bring up the scandals in the Church? But that might not work since despite human sinfulness the Church has endured for 2,000 years, people have continued to believe, and countless works of mercy and compassion have been performed by people of faith.

Would the devil point out that rational people should be guided by science and facts and not by unprovable beliefs? However, that argument weakens when we realize that many of world's greatest scientists were believers. Their study of science made them even more aware of the work of the Creator and confirmed their faith.

Would the devil try to show that the way of life glorified by the media is better than the way of living proclaimed in the Gospel? But that approach falls short when we consider that the more often God's ways are rejected the more unhappiness, violence, family breakdown, selfishness, and corruption seem to fill our world.

Then what would the devil do if he wanted to weaken someone's faith? Perhaps the most effective approach would be to convince a person to stop praying.

The less a person prays the more a person's faith weakens, grows cold, and dies.

That is why Jesus makes such a point in this Sunday's Gospel about the necessity of persistent prayer.

Jesus tells a parable about a widow who demands that a judge “who neither feared God nor respected any human being” render her a fair and favorable opinion. When he refuses to hear her case, she keeps pestering the judge until he finally relents and rules in her favor.

Luke informs us that Jesus told that parable in order to teach his disciples “about the necessity for them to pray always without becoming weary.”

That statement may lead us to think that the parable means we need to keep “pestering” God with our prayers until God relents and gives us what we want. Yet in Matthew's Gospel Jesus tells us, “In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words.” (Matthew 6:7)

Jesus tells us that we need to be persistent in prayer not to convince God to act but rather to make certain our faith does not weaken. That is why after relating the parable Jesus asks,

“When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?” Will he find people persisting in prayer, persisting in faith?

When people stop praying, their faith is in jeopardy. We certainly see that borne out in individuals whose Mass attendance becomes less than regular and gradually declines to just Christmas or Easter.

We see it in those whose daily prayer becomes weekly prayer, then monthly prayer, and then just a hurried prayer when disaster strikes.

We see it in those whose Bibles begin to accumulate dust rather than finger marks.

We see it in those who devote less and less time to their relationship with God and more to their digital devices, their video games, their recreational activities, and their careers.

When such things happen faith weakens, grows cold, and slowly fades away.

If the devil wants to rob us of our faith, he does not have to put forth arguments, he does not have to tempt us with money and power, he does not have to entice us with the “good life” All the devil has to do is to convince us to stop praying.

Faith needs persistent prayer. Without such prayer, Jesus questions “When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?”

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