

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, October 23, 2016

The Thirtieth 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.

THE HUMBLE CANDIDATE

Throughout this election season, which will be drawing to a close in a few weeks, various adjectives have been used to describe the candidates.

Those supporting a particular person describe their candidate as competent, honest, hard-working, dedicated, concerned, caring, well-prepared, sincere, honorable, moral, and so on.

While those opposed to a certain candidate describe that person as deceitful, incompetent, unprepared, uncaring, dishonest, immoral, selfish, power hungry, ambitious, disreputable, and so on.

But there is one adjective that is never applied to candidates either by their supporters or by their opponents. And that adjective is "humble."

It would be difficult, if not impossible, for those running for political office to be humble.

Throughout every campaign candidates have to constantly tell voters wonderful things about themselves and negative things about their opponents. They have to make the case for their proposals and they have to show the flaws and failings in the ideas being proposed by their opponents.

Those running for office need to talk a great deal about themselves. The word "I" fills their speeches. "I am the one who will work for you!" "I need your vote." "I am the only choice." Political candidates cannot be humble and self-effacing.

In this Sunday's Gospel (Luke 18:9-14), Jesus speaks about two men who go to the temple to pray, a Pharisee and a tax collector. As Jesus relates the words of their prayers it seems as if the Pharisee is running for office.

The Pharisee takes a prominent place in the temple and then he centers his words not on God but rather on himself. His prayer is "I" centered.

He tells God, "I am not like the rest of humanity --greedy, dishonest, adulterous...I fast twice a week, and I pay tithes on my whole income." He even knocks the other person calling upon God in the temple. "I am not...like this tax collector." The Pharisee sounds as if he is campaigning for God's vote of approval.

The tax collector, who is praying in the temple at the same time, admits he is a very flawed person, we might say a "flawed candidate." He takes a place in the back of the temple, bows his head and pleads, "O God, be merciful to me a sinner."

Jesus tells us that the tax collector, who humbly admitted his sins, left the temple “justified” before God. The Pharisee, who despised those he considered weak and sinful, left the temple “righteous” in his own eyes, but not in God’s.

Just as there are no perfect candidates running for office, there are no perfect Christians. All of us need God’s mercy and forgiveness for we all fall short of being the kind of people God expects us to be.

While humble, self-effacing candidates would most likely never win public office, humble Christians who honestly admit their flaws will win a place in the Kingdom of God. As Jesus says, “whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

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