

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, October 30, 2016

The Thirty First 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.

WHAT WILL THEY THINK?

What will other people think? That thought often crosses our minds when we are about to do something or say something that people might find strange or foolish. That thought even influences our actions.

For example, if we have strong convictions about a particular moral issue or political candidate we might keep that opinion to ourselves if we are with people who hold an opposite point of view.

Or if we enjoy playing hide and seek with our young nieces and nephews we might hesitate to play that game in a public park filled with people.

Or if we are with co-workers who are viciously gossiping about the boss we might nod in agreement rather than defend the reputation of our employer.

In those situations, we start asking ourselves what other people might think if we act a certain way.

In this Sunday's Gospel (Luke 19:1-10), we meet a man who apparently did not care what other people thought about him. Zacchaeus was a tax collector, a man of importance, but a man disliked by his fellow Jews from whom he demanded money not only to satisfy the Roman occupiers but also to line his own pockets.

When Jesus came to town, Zacchaeus wanted to see him. When the crowd blocked the view of the vertically-challenged Zacchaeus, he did something the people of Jericho would have thought ridiculous. He climbed a tree in order to see Jesus.

Imagine their reaction when they saw the despised tax collector balanced on a tree limb to see Jesus. It would be as if we saw the mayor of our town climbing a tree in order to get a better view of a parade.

But Zacchaeus did not care about what the people of Jericho thought about him. He only cared about seeing Jesus, and he was willing to do whatever was necessary to make that happen.

Zacchaeus was drawn to Jesus by more than simple curiosity. Curiosity alone would not have led him to shed his dignity to see Jesus. Zacchaeus must have heard about the preaching of Jesus, must have heard about his willingness to even eat with tax collectors and sinners. (Mark 2:16)

That willingness to ignore what other people might think led Zacchaeus to have a life-changing encounter with Jesus. One so great that Zacchaeus announced, "Half of my possessions, Lord, I shall give to the poor, and if I have extorted anything from anyone I shall repay it four times over."

If Zacchaeus had cared about the opinion of others he would have stayed home, away from the people who hated him. And he would not have encountered Jesus that day in Jericho.

In our lives, the Lord wants to encounter us. He wants to change us for the better. But for that to happen, we need to be like Zacchaeus, willing to do whatever is necessary to meet him, regardless of what others might think.

That means we go to Mass when our peers stay in bed. We express our thanks to God before eating not only at home but in a restaurant. We inform our boss and fellow employees we are taking time to attend a religious retreat. We seek the advice of others to find a mentor to help us grow spiritually. We reserve time in our day to read God's Word. We are merciful even to those who hurt us. We proclaim to others by our words and deeds that Jesus is the Lord of our life.

Zacchaeus would tell us not to allow our fear of what others might think to keep us from doing what is necessary to draw closer to Jesus – even if that means “climbing a tree.”

Rather than worrying about what others might think, we need only consider what God is thinking. After all, God's opinion is the only one that ultimately matters!

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