

# **LOOKING TO SUNDAY®**

**Sunday, November 6, 2016**

## ***The Thirty Second 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.

### **TWO SETS OF SEVEN**

"Seven brothers." If someone were asked to find a connection between this Sunday's Gospel (Luke 20:27-38) and the First Reading (2 Maccabees 9:1-2, 9-14) "seven brothers" might be the response.

In the First Reading, seven brothers and their mother are brought before the pagan king who was trying to impose the Greek way of life on all those under his rule.

The king had decreed that the Jews had to abandon their religious traditions by eating pork in violation of God's law. If they did they would live, if they refused they would die.

Seven brothers are brought before the king and rather than obeying him, they each make a decision to obey God. So in sight of their mother, the seven brothers are horrifically tortured and killed one by one. After witnessing the execution of her beloved sons, she herself is put to death.

Those seven brothers died with the hope that God would reward their faithfulness to him by raising them to new life. As one of the brothers told the king, "You accursed fiend, you are depriving us of this present life, but the King of the world will raise us up to live again forever."

In the Gospel, the Sadducees, who did not believe in the resurrection, challenge Jesus by posing a hypothetical situation that involves seven brothers.

In what they propose, one of the brothers dies without an heir. Following procedures given by Moses, a second brother marries the widow in order to produce an heir so the name and inheritance of the first brother will not be lost.

But that second brother dies without producing a son, so a third brother then marries the woman and so on down the line. Eventually all seven brothers marry the serial widow – all without producing an heir. Then she dies. So the Sadducees ask, "In the resurrection whose wife will that woman be?"

The Sadducees create the situation to show the absurdity of believing that life continues after death. Messy situations in this life would become even worse in a next life.

In response, Jesus refuses to be bound by the parameters of their question. He says that the life to come is not an extension of life as we know it today. The life to come is different.

Relationships are different. Things are different. As Jesus says, "Those deemed worthy to attain to the coming age ... neither marry nor are given in marriage...they are like angels."

The same thought appears in the First Letter of John, "Beloved, we are God's children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We know that when it is revealed we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2)

Those stories, each about seven brothers, reveal two approaches that people can take to the question of eternal life.

Those who reject the idea of resurrection believe, as the Sadducees did, that life as we know it could not possibly continue. The situation of seven brothers all having the same wife is only one of a never-ending series of problems and absurdities they claim would arise.

Those who accept the resurrection as something beyond earthly understanding, see it as giving humanity hope even when confronted with evil, suffering and death. It dramatically did that for seven brothers whose courage and unfailing devotion to God were praised in the First Reading.

It also did that for Jesus himself. He faced the cross with the absolute hope that God the Father does not abandon his children to the oblivion of nothingness when they die. As Jesus says, God “is not God of the dead, but of the living, for to him all are alive.”

What people believe about eternal life is not just something that affects how they view what follows death; it affects how they live today. It determines whether like the seven brothers of our First Reading, they live with hope and trust in God’s eternal care for them or like the Sadducees of our Gospel, they restrict their vision only to this world.

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