

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, November 13, 2016

The Thirty Third 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.

OPPORTUNITY AND MOTIVE

When a crime is committed, investigators with the task of finding those responsible look for people with opportunity and motive.

Who was in the area at the time the crime was committed?

Who had a motive to hurt or injure a particular person or group or steal or deface a piece of property?

In this Sunday's Gospel (Luke 21:5-19), Jesus speaks of the natural disasters and social upheavals that will herald the end of time and his coming glory. Jesus also speaks of the persecutions that his disciples will endure at the hands of strangers and non-believing relatives.

While earthquakes, plagues, and other natural disasters are not caused by human actors, and while societal upheavals have a myriad of causes that are hard to narrow down, neither is the case with persecutions.

When Christians are persecuted, when they are harassed, ridiculed, verbally abused, denied employment, passed over for promotion, physically attacked and even murdered, we can look for those responsible in terms of opportunity and motive.

Opportunity is easy. All those in areas where Christians are living have opportunity. But motive needs investigation. What would motivate people to persecute Christians?

Christians who are striving to faithfully follow Jesus, to live out their baptismal promises, and to act according to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, are the kind of people who show mercy and compassion to others; who share their blessings with the needy; who feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, shelter the homeless, and visit the sick; who forgive their enemies; and invite others to hear the Good News that has touched their own lives. They are hardly the kind of people who would seem to provide motivation for persecution.

So what motivates individuals, groups, and even governments to persecute Christians as Jesus predicted would happen?

Perhaps Christians are attacked for the same reasons that Jesus was persecuted.

Jesus brought light into a world that had grown accustomed to living in the darkness of sin and selfishness.

Jesus proclaimed mercy to a culture that glorified power, possessions, and violence.

Jesus upheld the dignity and value of those often dismissed by society – the poor, the stranger, the widow, the orphan, the elderly, and the sick.

Jesus taught that obedience to God's will was the way to true freedom and not unbridled human whim.

Jesus challenged the status quo and the hypocrisy of the powerful.

Jesus pointed out sin and evil when he saw it and called sinners to repentance and conversion of heart.

In short, Jesus upset the sinful, the complacent, the self-obsessed, the materialistic, the pleasure-addicted, and the godless. He made them uncomfortable by his words and way of living.

When Jesus did that, and when his followers do that today, the world does all it can to remove the source of discomfort. The light of Christ is more difficult to endure as the darkness in society deepens. The Gospel is more difficult to hear as it stands against the values of an increasingly secular culture.

The persecutions that Jesus predicted are happening and they are being carried out by people with opportunity and motive. As that happens we can find hope in the assurance of Jesus, "By your perseverance you will secure your lives."

Persecution will not have the final victory.

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