

# **LOOKING TO SUNDAY®**

**Sunday, November 20, 2016**

## ***The Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe***

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.

### **AN ENDING IN MIND**

Whenever we begin something, it makes sense to have the ending in mind. For example, when an author begins to write a mystery novel, that author has to know how he will end his story, otherwise his writing will wander in one direction and then in another and leave the reader confused and unsatisfied.

When a tour guide begins to lead a group of people through an art museum she needs to know what exhibits to visit and what work of art she will save to the end so the tour concludes on an artistic high. A guide who simply wanders with no plan in mind and just concludes the tour when time is up is a person who will soon be looking for new employment.

Last December 8, we began observing the Year of Mercy that was declared by Pope Francis. The Pope decided to begin this observance with the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception and he chose to bring it to an end this Sunday on the Solemnity of Our Lord Jesus Christ, the King of the Universe.

Pope Francis may have chosen this Sunday to end this Year of Mercy since it is the last Sunday of the liturgical year of 2016. A last Sunday for a last Sunday.

But perhaps the Holy Father may have selected this Sunday in light of its Gospel reading. Sunday's Gospel (Luke 23:35-43) contains what might be the most dramatic act of mercy found in the Gospels.

In that Gospel passage, taken from the Passion Narrative according to Luke, Jesus is being crucified. As he hangs upon the cross he is taunted by the onlookers and the soldiers gathered to witness the agonizing death of the one mockingly labeled, "The King of the Jews."

Even one of the two criminals being crucified along with Jesus reviles and berates him for his inability to save himself and them from their fate.

But the other criminal being crucified that Good Friday afternoon recognizes what those scoffers could not see. He sees Jesus not only as an innocent victim, "this man has done nothing criminal," but as something more. He sees someone who can give him something even more wonderful than escape from human suffering and death, so he cries out, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

His request leads Jesus to respond, "Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise."

In that moment, Jesus, our Lord and God, our Savior and Friend, acts with undeserved and unmerited mercy. The so-called Good Thief does nothing to earn forgiveness. It is simply given

when asked. We might even say that the repentant thief receives more than just mercy; he is canonized in that moment and declared to have a place in heaven.

The stories of the Lord's mercy that we have heard in the Gospel of Luke during this liturgical year – stories about a wayward son, an adulterous woman, a widow grieving her dead son, a group of ostracized lepers, a cheating tax collector – all come to a wonderful conclusion as the Lord shows mercy to a condemned criminal simply because he asks not to be forgotten.

Our tour through scenes of Luke's Gospel ends with our contemplation of a tableau that provokes astonishment and awe to this very day. The crucified, dying Savior forgets his pain to offer consolation and hope to an undeserving thief.

When Pope Francis began this Year of Mercy he may have had this ending in mind. For this Gospel relates a plea for mercy that was absolutely answered – a plea for mercy that we can make our own when our sins and failings have nailed us to a cross of guilt and despair. "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

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