

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, December 14, 2014

This email, entitled Looking to Sunday®, focuses on the Gospel Reading 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.

A PRESS CONFERENCE

Whenever the president, a governor, or other high-ranking government official holds a press conference the room is filled with reporters asking questions. Sometimes those seeking to get their questions answered jump up and shout as loud as possible to get the attention of the person speaking. Such press conferences are particularly frenzied affairs when something significant has happened or if a government official has done something surprising, game-changing, or scandalous.

This Sunday's Gospel (John 2:6-8, 19-28) seems like a first century press conference. In the thirteen verses that make up that passage, seven questions are fired at John the Baptist. The priests and Levites from Jerusalem ask him, "Who are you?" "What are you then?" "Are you Elijah?" "Are you the Prophet?" "Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us?" "What do you have to say for yourself?" Then the Pharisees direct a question at John, "Why then do you baptize if you are not the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?"

The religious leaders were prompted to send "reporters" to question John because they heard of what he was doing and learned of the crowds being attracted by his preaching. If John had remained a man of solitude and prayer in the desert, eating his locusts and wild honey, he would have gone through life unquestioned. It was the public life, preaching, and ministry of John the Baptist that aroused the curiosity of those in Jerusalem and prompted them to ask their questions.

Those questions gave John the opportunity to explain who he was. Applying the words of Isaiah to himself, John answered, "I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'make straight the way of the Lord.'" Those questions also provided John with an occasion to proclaim the coming of the Messiah. "I baptize with water; but there is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie."

Those who had come to John were interested and ready to hear what he had to say. After all, they were the ones asking the questions to which he was responding.

Like John the Baptist, we as Christians are called to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. That responsibility has been recently highlighted by Pope Francis, who wrote, "Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization." (*The Joy of the Gospel*, #120).

We all can engage in such evangelization by living good moral lives marked by generosity, love, forgiveness, compassion, and fidelity to the Gospel in an increasingly materialistic, self-centered, amoral society. Doing so may prompt people to question us about our values and our approach to life. Their questions will provide us with an opportunity to tell them about our Christian faith and our relationship with Jesus Christ.

As John the Baptist might tell us, evangelization has a greater chance of success when it happens in response to questions that people ask. Or to put it more simply, live so you make people curious. So curious that they start asking questions!

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