

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, December 20, 2015

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

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.

UNCONSCIOUS OF STATUS

"Equal justice under law" is the phrase engraved on the façade of the Supreme Court Building in Washington DC. That phrase expresses our hope that all people will be treated equally.

While the law might try to treat all people the same way, we often do not. Though we might not readily admit it, we rank people differently and treat them accordingly. As a society we are very status conscious.

For example, we consider a member of the senate as more important than a congressional representative. We judge the CEO of a company as more important than the mailroom clerk. We place entertainment celebrities and athletes on levels far above their fans. We place our military personnel in clearly defined categories that show their rank and grade. And we even think of ourselves as having a certain status in society.

In this Sunday's Gospel (Luke 1:39-45), we meet a woman who surprisingly did not act according to the status and position that were rightfully hers.

When Mary was told by the angel that she had been favored above all women to be the mother of the Savior, she was also told that her cousin Elizabeth was in the sixth month of an unexpected pregnancy. In response, Mary immediately "set out and traveled to the hill country in haste" so she could assist Elizabeth in the last months before the birth of her son, John.

When Elizabeth saw Mary at her door, she was astounded. Elizabeth asked, "And how does this happen to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"

Elizabeth knew that Mary certainly outranked her in importance. If anyone should have been making a trip, Elizabeth should have gone to the home of Mary. As Elizabeth said of Mary, "Blessed are you among women."

But Mary was not status conscious, she went to assist Elizabeth. Mary's humility astounded Elizabeth and it continues to impress us today.

The wonderful feast of Christmas that we will soon celebrate sets before us the highest example of someone not acting according to status and position.

The Son of God put aside his divine rank and came among his creatures. As Paul wrote in his Letter to the Philippians, "though he was in the form of God ... he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave ... he humbled himself." Even the place where Jesus was born was not ranked highly. As we are told in Sunday's Second Reading, Bethlehem was "too small to be among the clans of Judah." (Micah 5:1)

The Fourth Sunday of Advent shows us that Mary did not act according to the rank and status that were appropriately hers, nor did her Son. May we follow their example, may we surprise people by our humility, kindness, and service. May we be unconscious of status!

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Best Wishes for a Joyful Christmas Season!