

# **LOOKING TO SUNDAY®**

**Sunday, December 31, 2017**

## ***The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph***

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.

### **FAMILY TRADITIONS**

Most families have special traditions and rituals that they faithfully follow during the year.

Those traditions include serving particular foods on certain holidays – foods often prepared according to recipes handed down from one family cook to another.

Those rituals determine where the extended family will gather on Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's Day, Mother's Day and Father's Day, and who will host the celebration.

We feel a sense of sorrow when such rituals and traditions begin to fade as children grow and leave home, as relatives move farther away, and as the older generation, often the keepers of tradition, are called home by the Lord.

Traditions and rituals are essential to family life. They strengthen relationships, bring family members together, and keep cherished memories alive.

Rituals and traditions are also important to our national life. We are formed as a nation by the values we share and by the rituals and traditions we observe. For example, Fourth of July celebrations, Memorial Day and Veterans Day observances, singing the National Anthem, and flying the flag help to unite us as citizens.

Rituals and traditions are also essential to our lives as believers. They bring us into contact with the Lord and into contact with others who share our faith.

In this Sunday's Gospel (Luke 2:22-40) for the Feast of the Holy Family we hear how Mary and Joseph observe the religious rituals connected with the birth of Jesus.

Mary undergoes a time of purification after the birth of her son. Jesus, since he is a first-born male, is presented to the Lord as required by religious custom. And in the verse immediately preceding this Sunday's Gospel, Luke tell us, "When eight days were completed for his circumcision, he was named Jesus, the name given him by the angel before he was conceived in the womb." (Luke 2:21)

It is while Mary and Joseph are observing those religious rituals of their people, that Simeon and Anna come on the scene and announce that the child Jesus is the fulfillment of the hopes and dreams of the Chosen People. Then when Mary and Joseph "had fulfilled all the prescriptions in the law of the Lord, they returned ... to their own town of Nazareth."

Later in his Gospel, Luke relates how the Holy Family kept another religious tradition. "Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom." (Luke 2:41)

Jesus grew up in a home where Mary and Joseph faithfully followed their religious customs, traditions, and rituals. Being in such an environment helped Jesus to grow in wisdom and grace.

As Catholics we too have our religious customs, rituals, and traditions that bring us into a relationship with God, that form us as a Church community, that help us to grow in our faith, and strengthen us to fulfill our mission of proclaiming the Gospel.

Those rituals include celebrating the Sacraments, listening to the Scriptures, spending time in prayer, performing works of charity, and above all gathering each Sunday for the celebration of Mass. That Sunday ritual, that tradition handed down from the time of the Apostles, that sacred custom, forms us like no other. Without Sunday Mass our faith begins to fade away.

Just as family life is weakened when customs and traditions are no longer followed; the same is true when it comes to our faith life.

Jesus, Mary, and Joseph show us that loving families, holy families, are ones where parents and children keep the traditions, rituals, and customs of their faith.

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***Best Wishes for a New Year filled with God's Presence and Peace!***