

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, February 28, 2016

The Third Sunday of Lent

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.

INVESTMENT RETURNS

When retirees put money into annuities, when parents sacrifice to cover their children's college tuition, when coaches give extra time and attention to certain players, they all want the same thing. They want a return on their investment!

Retirees want their annuities to provide them with a good return to help cover their expenses.

Parents expect their children to get good grades, to earn a college degree, and to secure a good job.

Coaches anticipate that the players who have benefitted from their extra instruction will become outstanding athletes.

When we invest in something or in someone, we expect a return.

In this Sunday's Gospel (Luke 13:1-9), Jesus tells a parable which indicates that God has that same expectation.

Jesus speaks of "a person who had a fig tree planted in his orchard." For three years he comes looking for figs. He comes expecting some return but finds nothing. So he decides to literally cut his losses. He tells his gardener, "So cut it down. Why should it exhaust the soil?"

The gardener intervenes and requests the fig tree be given one more year of care and cultivation in the hope that it would finally bear fruit. The owner agrees and the tree is granted one final year to bear figs.

Jesus tells that parable after hearing reports about some Galileans cruelly killed by the order of Pilate, the Roman Governor, and 18 people killed when a tower came crashing down on them in the area of Siloam. Jesus responds to both incidents by saying, "But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did."

Those words of Jesus warn us that if we do not bear the fruit of repentance, if we do not turn away from sin, then we risk perishing, we run the risk of being cut down like the unproductive fig tree.

But the Lord is not only like the owner of the orchard who demands a return. In his mercy the Lord is also like the gardener who intercedes on behalf of the fig tree. Each year, the Lord gives us the season of Lent so that we might open ourselves to being cultivated and fertilized by Word and Sacrament and so grow into productive Christians who bear the fruit of charity, kindness, and forgiveness.

We all can run the risk of presuming that God is so loving and forgiving that how we live or what we do makes little difference. However that is not the impression that Jesus gives us in

this Sunday's Gospel. Jesus makes it clear that God expects us to bear fruit. If not we will be cut down.

In other words, God expects a return on his investment in us!

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