

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Palm Sunday, April 1, 2012

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.

INRI

If you look at a crucifix above the head of Christ there is a scroll with the letters INRI. Those letters stand for *Iesvs Nazarens Rex Iudaeorum*, Latin for "Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews." It was a Roman practice to put a sign over the accused to announce the crime for which he was being crucified.

As we read in Mark's Account of the Passion, which is read this coming Palm Sunday, "The inscription of the charge against him read, 'The King of the Jews.'" The Jewish authorities had falsely accused Jesus of proclaiming himself an earthly king. That is why when the members of the Sanhedrin handed him over to Pilate, the Roman governor asked him "Are you the king of the Jews?" That is why the Roman soldiers put a crown of thorns on his head and mocked Jesus saying "Hail, King of the Jews."

Pilate perceived Jesus as a threat to Roman authority. There was but one king over Judea and over all the empire. That was the Emperor of Rome. All threats to Caesar's power were to be crushed.

INRI proclaimed a false charge made against Jesus. He desired no position of worldly power. He was no king seeking royal palaces, standing armies, and treasuries of gold. Yet in another sense, in a spiritual sense, the inscription above the cross was true. Jesus was the king of the Jews, in fact, he was the king of all nations and peoples, the king of all creation.

But Jesus was a king who showed his power by being powerless. He did nothing to stop one of his closest disciples from betraying him to the Jewish authorities. He went to an open space to pray and did nothing to escape the mob. He made no defense before Pilate. He permitted himself to be taunted and mocked by unfeeling troops. He allowed his hands and feet to be nailed to beams of wood and his life to slowly drain from his tortured body.

Jesus was the king who the world would judge powerless. But of all kings, he is the one most remembered, honored, and followed by billions of people to this very day. For in powerlessness, he showed true power. Jesus had the strength to remain faithful to the Father and faithful to the Gospel he had preached. "Offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one to him as well." (Matthew 5:39) "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5: 44) "What profit is there for a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his life." (Mark 8:36) "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me; still, not my will but yours be done." (Luke 22:42)." That powerlessness of Jesus continues each time Mass is celebrated as the Lord places his Body and Blood into our hands.

We live in a world that is much like the one that witnessed the events of the first Good Friday. A world where power rests with those who level charges against people and put them on "crosses." But as the crucifixion, death, and resurrection of Jesus proclaim, true power is found in being powerless in the eyes of the world and remaining faithful to God no matter the cross we face. INRI, Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews. The charge is true. The one on the cross is the King of the Jews and the King of all Creation!

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