

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, July 14, 2013

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 BROADER DEFINITION

The definition of a word often changes over time. For example, at the birth of our nation, a voter was understood to be a white male, at least 21 years of age, who owned land or had taxable wealth. Later the requirement to own land or to have a certain amount of wealth was removed.

With the ratification of the 15th Amendment to the Constitution in 1870, a voter was defined as a 21-year-old male of any race; even former slaves could vote.

Then with the 19th Amendment in 1920, the definition expanded to include females as well as males. Women were now voters.

In 1971, with the passage of the 26th Amendment, a voter was identified simply as a citizen 18 years of age or older.

Over time the right to vote has broadened and with it the definition of a voter. A person living in 1813 would define a voter one way while a person living today would have a much more expansive understanding of a voter.

In this Sunday's Gospel (Luke 10:25-37), we read how Jesus broadened the definition not of the word "voter," but of the word "neighbor." In that Gospel, a scholar of the law affirms that as a faithful Jew he must love God and love his neighbor as himself. He then asks Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?"

In response Jesus tells a parable about a man who became a victim of thieves. The man is robbed, beaten half-dead, and left by the road. A Jewish priest and then a Levite, a religious functionary, pass by and do nothing. A Samaritan, a member of a group of people considered heretical and unclean by the Jews, stops and assists the beaten man.

The priest and Levite were not bad people. I am certain that they would have claimed that they loved God and loved their neighbor. The problem was their definition of the word "neighbor." For them, the word meant someone living in close proximity, someone they knew. It meant a fellow Jew, not a Gentile, and not someone whose touch could make them ritually unclean.

The priest and Levite did not recognize the victim alongside the road as a neighbor. However, the Samaritan did. He saw not a stranger who could be ignored, but a neighbor with whom he had a human connection.

In telling that parable, Jesus broadened the definition of the word neighbor. A neighbor is not just a person we know; a neighbor is anyone in need. It is that neighbor that we are called to love.

Also when we act as a person whose charitable feelings and good actions are not limited by race, religion, ethnicity, politics, social standing, sexual orientation, or any other category that divides us from another, we reveal ourselves to be a good neighbor, a Good Samaritan.

Jesus gave the word neighbor a very expansive definition. It includes everyone!

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