

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, September 4, 2011

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.

NOT PERFECT

If there were a society without disease, there would be no need for doctors or drugs or medical advice.

If there were a society where people were born with fully developed intellects, there would be no need for schools or teachers.

If there were a society where everyone was morally upright, there would be no need for laws, or courts, or police officers.

But there is disease, and ignorance, and moral failings. We realize very quickly that society is not perfect.

Yet when it comes to the religious society we call the Church, people expect perfection. They expect members of the Church to be without sin, selfishness, or hypocrisy.

But as we know, that is not the case. The Church is far from perfect. If perfection were a requirement for entering the Church, there would only be empty pews on Sunday and no one standing at the pulpit or altar.

Jesus knew his Church would not be perfect; it would be composed of imperfect people. This Sunday's Gospel (Matthew 18:15-20) is proof of that. There Jesus teaches his disciples how to handle the disputes, arguments, and hostility that will arise among them. He teaches them how they are to deal with sinful people and sinful situations.

If someone has a concern, grievance or complaint against another Christian, that individual should privately speak to that person about the situation. There is to be no "texting" of another's sin, no social network of gossip and accusation.

If that private conversation brings no results, Jesus instructs the person with the complaint or concern to invite another person or two to join him or her in speaking to the person in question. The purpose of bringing others is not to pile on the other person, but to help that person realize that others have the same concern as the individual who first came to him/her.

If that brings no resolution, Jesus teaches that the situation needs to be brought to the attention of the Church, in other words, to the attention of the local faith community. That community is to prayerfully consider the situation and then arrive at a decision. As Jesus says, "Amen, I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

If the person approached by the community "refuses to listen even to the Church," Jesus says "then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector."

Jesus knew his Church would not be perfect so he spoke of ways to handle the sins and imperfections that would arise among his followers. Such sins and imperfections need to be addressed for as individuals we are responsible for one another, and as a faith community we are responsible for witnessing to the Risen Lord by our personal lives and by how we live as his Church.

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