

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, September 29, 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.

NOT ONLY THE 1%

It is reported that 1% of Americans control 40% of the wealth in the United States and take in some 20% of the nation's income. The disparity between that 1% and the other 99% is glaring and the gap between the two groups continues to widen. The rich get richer, the poor get poorer, and the middle class shrinks.

In this Sunday's Gospel (Luke 16:19-31), we hear Jesus tell a parable that gives flesh and blood to those statistics. Jesus tells of a rich man who dresses in "purple garments," a sign of wealth and status, and dines "sumptuously each day." At the door of that rich man is Lazarus. Hungry, hurting, and covered with sores, Lazarus longs for the scraps that fall from the rich man's table. That rich man was certainly among the 1% of his day, while Lazarus was among those on the bottom rung of the 99%.

Death comes to both men, and there is a complete reversal of fortune. Lazarus, who was poor and miserable, finds joy with God, while the rich man loses his status and is given a place of lasting misery. The rich man becomes the beggar, pleading for a drop of water, while Lazarus is given a place of honor at the side of Abraham.

When we hear that parable, we can easily think that its message applies to the 1%. They have the money. They have the wealth. So they have the obligation to help the poor and the hurting. Yet Jesus did not preach the Gospel for just some people. He did not intend for this parable to be heard by only 1% of the people and ignored by 99%.

We may not be among the 1%, but most of us would be considered rich in comparison to the poor of the world. In a world where millions of people do not have adequate housing, we build garages so our cars will have a home. In a world where millions go to bed hungry, more than 20% of our food ends up in the trash. In a world where clean water, sanitation, and health care are luxuries for many, we spend 14 billion dollars a year to treat our sick pets. In a world where 1.2 billion people do not have electricity, we have more energy consuming light fixtures, appliances, and digital devices than we can count. In a world where many of the poor can carry all their belongings on their back, we have some 50,000 self storage facilities in our nation to hold what our closets cannot contain.

Most of us are rich indeed compared to the truly poor. Those poor may not be literally at our door, but the poor, the hurting, and the suffering of our society and of our world are continually brought before us. We cannot hide from Lazarus. He appears before us on our television screens and digital devices. He comes before us in the appeals for help we receive in the mail and hear from the pulpit. In fact, in our media saturated age, we have more chances to see and hear Lazarus than ever before.

This Sunday's Gospel challenges us to look at our response to the poor and the hurting. This Gospel is not for the 1%, but for the 100%. If we open our eyes, we will see that Lazarus is also at our door.

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