

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, September 30, 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.

EVALUATIONS

In recent years there has been a good deal of discussion about teacher evaluation. Teachers, many believe, should be evaluated according to how their students perform on standardized tests and rated according to their ability to teach their subject matter.

But even if there are no formal teacher evaluations, teachers are continually being evaluated by students and parents. Just ask students in any school and they will be able to point out the good and the bad teachers.

But teachers are not the only ones being evaluated and judged, we all are. It even happens in church. Priests are judged according to how well they preach and lead prayer. Lectors are evaluated according to how clearly they proclaim the readings. Music ministers are evaluated according to their choice of hymns and the quality and tempo of their music.

This Sunday's Gospel (Mark 9:38-43, 45, 47-48) is about the evaluation that we face as Christians. Jesus speaks of those of us who would be evaluated as being a source of scandal and bad example, particularly to "little ones," namely, the young who are most impressionable and those whose faith is weak.

Using dramatic language, Jesus says that if our hand causes us to sin and lead others astray, cut it off. The same is true for a foot or an eye. Obviously, Jesus is not telling us to disfigure our own bodies, but he is calling upon us to prune away whatever keeps us from being seen and evaluated as being faithful Christians.

If our hand greedily grasps for wealth and power and the latest must-have item, if our hand refuses to let go of some of what we have acquired to help those in need – that is a problem and a scandal.

If our feet move us away from God and God's Church, if they take us to places where God is disregarded and Gospel values are scorned and ignored – that is a problem and a scandal.

If our eyes see success in terms of money and possessions, if they look upon pornographic and violent images that poison the human spirit, if they fail to see others as children of the same God – that is a problem and a scandal.

We are to live as faithful Christians. We are to cut away anything that lessens the good example we are to give. And we are to do that not just for our own sake, but for the sake of those who see us and evaluate us as followers of Jesus Christ.

Evaluations, formal and informal, are always taking place. We are to live so that our evaluation as a Christian is a positive one, and not a negative one that leads others astray.