

LOOKING TO SUNDAY®

Sunday, December 9, 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.

ONCE UPON A TIME

"Once upon a time....." Many children's stories begin with these words. When we hear them, even as adults, we know we are about to hear a story, and the child in each of us eagerly awaits what is to follow.

"Once upon a time, in a far away land, there lived a man who ate the strangest food, and wore the oddest clothes. He didn't live in a village with other people nor out in the country on a farm. He certainly didn't live in a city with respectable people who knew how to dress and what kind of food was best to eat. No he lived out in the middle of the desert. He was strange indeed...."

When we hear of John the Baptist, who appears in the Gospel for this Second Sunday of Advent (Luke 3:1-6), we can easily think of him as a distant, almost mythical figure in a religious story that we first heard as children. He was a character who intrigued us, not with his message, but rather with his diet of locusts and wild honey and his clothing of camel's hair.

But John was no figure in a mythical saga. He was a man of flesh and blood who lived in a definite time and place. Luke makes that very clear in this Sunday's Gospel when he writes of the beginning of the ministry of John the Baptist. Luke pinpoints the time when John began to proclaim his message by telling us who was reigning as emperor of Rome, who was the Roman governor in charge of Judea, and who were the Jewish leaders then functioning with the blessing of the occupying Romans. Luke also informs us that Annas and Caiaphas were the Jewish high priests of the day. Luke situates the ministry of John the Baptist in a definite, historical context. He then tells us where the ministry of John took place, namely, "throughout the whole region of the Jordan."

John called his listeners to prepare the way for the Lord at a particular time and in a particular place. He was a figure of history and not a character in a "bible story" that happened "once upon a time." The people of his day saw him and heard his message of repentance. He was real, his message was real, and that left them with a choice. They could accept his message and repent, or they could reject his words and continue living as they were.

Today, as the message of the Gospel is proclaimed once more, the message of John the Baptist confronts us at this particular time and in this particular place. It is not meant for people who lived once upon a time, but for us living today. John is exhorting us to turn away from those things, those actions, those relationships that keep us from letting God come more fully into our life.

As Luke makes clear, John the Baptist came at a definite time and place some 2,000 years ago. This Sunday, John will come before us once again as the Gospel is proclaimed at Mass. John's call to repentance is real and current, it is not something for "once upon a time."

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