

Feb 12, Septuagesima, Pre Lenten 2017

This morning we enter into the Pre-Lenten Period of the church called Septuagesima

(which actually means 70 days) as we are within 70 days of Easter Sunday.

And once again we see the beauty of our prayer book as we examine the readings for the day.

St. Paul writes to the Corinthians using the analogy of us being an athlete

– of running a race, of winning the race, of obtaining the prize.

This image of a race is perfect for the beginning of our pre-Lenten season.

It is during Lent Season that our training (of the pre-Lenten period) pays off.

We are to prepare now / so that we can enter the Lenten period strong and ready –

we train now, so that we can run the race that set before us.

Two words in Paul's letter jumped out when I read his Epistle.

He speaks of being **temperate** (of self-restraint – of being disciplined)

and of **subjection** (of being brought under the control of another and of obedience.)

This tells us two important traits of the Christian Faith –

we must learn self-restraint through becoming disciplined in the ways of Christ

of which we learn through His Words (of Scripture) and through the teaching of His Church.

Secondly, we are not only to hear His words but we are to bring our lives into **subjection** (of subjecting our lives)

not only in the hearing of his words but of disciplining our lives to be within His will.

Thus, during this upcoming Lenten period St. Michael the Archangel will offer different tools

for you to use to bring your lives in line with His Will.

I recommend your participation in our Lenten Devotionals and in all Lenten activities we will offer during Lent.

This morning's Gospel is one of hope for all of us.

I have heard sermons preached on the different groups of workers as representing different denominations,

and of representing different classes of people and so on.

But I want us to reflect upon this reading as it pertains to **Heaven** and as it pertains to **each one of us**.

We read of “labourers” (you and I) and of a vineyard (heaven).

It is a story told in all of the synoptic Gospels / and is one that most have heard many times.

This parable brings into view the difference between God’s Justice and what man considers “Just.”

This parable also displays a terrible sin which we all have – the sin of pride and self-righteousness.

Of us being more worthy than others through earnings from our works.

This parable, this story, should make us all reflect upon ourselves and of our own short comings.

Of interest in this story, the householder of this vineyard offers a specific deal to the first group of workers

(a penny for a day’s work) – and they agree.

The other four groups (in the 3rd, 6th, 9th, and 11th hour) were hired under the clause

that the householder would pay them “**whatsoever is right.**”

With this understanding they all worked together, although some worked longer than others.

I would even suggest that the earliest hired workers would have been glad to see the later hires /

as it allowed more to be done and maybe reduce the work load on all.

So the work is finished and all are called to be paid, beginning with the last workers hired.

Their reward was the same as everyone else.

They all received a penny.

From the earliest to the last, regardless of the work done, they all received a penny

(this is what was promised to the first workers and what the householder believed to be, as he said,

“whatsoever is right” to those hired later.

When the payments are made and seen by all,

pride and self-righteousness jumps right in –

can you hear their complaints:

I did more work, I worked longer hours, and finally - I am being treated unfairly.

So now, even justice is considered –

(of what is just and not just, what is fair and unfair)

then gossip, I am sure, followed: this man is mean and unfair, this man tricked us, and so on.

Oh yes, human emotions I am sure were all unleashed.

In the heart of the story – is where I want us to place ourselves – spiritually and physically.

As Human Beings, we are beings of this world and of this worlds “justice”, but yet we belong to another world, a Spiritual world also.

Therefore; we can only understand this story through becoming **temperate**, of becoming disciplined, in our faith

(of showing self-restraint with our heart, soul, and mind – as well with our tongues;)

and also by bringing our emotions under **subjection**, under the control, of Jesus Christ – as we seek Him above all else.

You see, God’s justice is not the same as our Justice.

It cannot be.

Let me ask you a question – how can a “God of Justice” not demand “justice” –

how can he not administer the justice that all of us deserve, and of which we actually should demand.

We love to throw around the word Justice, by demanding those harmed be rewarded

by some form of payment by those who did the harm.

And yet it is our God,

who thankfully, does not demand to be “paid back.”

How can this be?

Should He not demand our death instead of giving us life?

It is only **through His love**

in the sending of Jesus Christ He allows our understanding of Justice, **not to prevail.**

He paid our debt to Himself, once and for all, by the sending of His Son to remove this terrible disease, called sin, from our bodies.

Our cure to sin will soon hang upon the Cross!

And his final words should bring comfort to each of us

as Jesus tells the penitent thief upon the cross, these words "TODAY, WITH ME, IN PARADISE."

This labourer who labored upon the cross and accepted Jesus in the "eleventh" hour of his life found Jesus,

just as those who had walked with him during his earthly ministry.

He had only labored with Jesus for a few hours; yet, received him **the fullness of Paradise** (not only a portion – only one hours' worth) but a full portion.

So I say to you, come to Jesus, whether in the first hour or eleventh – come and become totally His.

And now back to the story: Instead of the earlier workers being happy for those who came later,

they thought of themselves first;

instead of heaping praise upon the householder, they had contempt for him for his generosity.

This is a terrible trait that so many of us have –

instead of rejoicing for the others, we get wrapped up in “me first.”

We seek man’s judgement (what is fair) and yet we pray to God that he does not the same to us.

Just maybe we should rejoice instead of complaining.

Look, and ye will find that, we all have so much to rejoice in,

and yet through pride and self-righteousness we end up in the ditch of negativity and of bitter feelings against others.

Putting others first is a great way to help all of us out of the ditch.

So for those of you who have “borne the heat of the day” and labored long, I say simply – rejoice.

Reach out to help others withstand the heat of the day.

If ye be strong, use your strength to raise others, your strength is seen through your actions and love towards others.

Let Jesus be seen by others through the way you treat others and place your priorities in the loving of God and neighbor.

The Gospel ends that many (each of you) are called to Jesus Christ, but not all will be chosen.

We all are chosen to run the race and it is through the mastery of temperance

and bringing all things, yourselves, into subjection to His Will.

So, let us train together as we seek that mastery of Good things.

Let us Break Bread Together,

Let us Pray together,

Let us play together,

Let us share together,

Let us weep together,

Let us laugh together,

Let us walk with Jesus Christ together,

Let us be His ... above all things.

Come, partake of His Body and Blood and learn from Him the wonders of temperance and obedience and become His forever.

Labor, rejoice in God and others, and show forth His love in your life.