

Saint Thomas' Church
 Sexagesima
 February 16, 2020
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In the propers for today, we pray for God's defense from all adversity in the Collect.

St Paul angrily defends his work in the church with a list of what he has suffered for it.

And Jesus uses a parable to explain why not everyone responds to the word of God.

Thirty years ago to the day,

Archbishop Morse stood before
 the Congregation of this St Thomas' Church
 and spoke of what he described as
 "This wonderful season of Pre-Lent".

He likened it to a swinging door

That slowly closed to the joyous time
 of the Epiphany of our Lord

and slowly opened to the somber and sobering time of Lent

And our pilgrimage leading to the Cross at Calvary
 Our Lord's death
 And glorious Resurrection.

He observed that the Christian Calendar

With its enriching cycle of the liturgical year
 Was in direct contrast with the calendar of the secular world,
 Which is lacking in mystery and contemplation.

Morse who worked as a campus Chaplain to the University
 Community in Berkeley

Where he lived and founded the Seminary of our Church

Spoke of a conversation he had with a young undergraduate

In which Morse concluded that people of the mid 20th

Century

do want to think

He said that a person had to think in order to believe in God.

Ask the questions that are no longer asked these days:
 The questions of existence:
 Why am I here?
 Where did I come from?
 Where am I going?
 They don't want to choose to be just in an unjust world
 They don't want to seek goodness
 Pursue love
 Find God
 And discover who they really are.

In 10 days,
 we will gather in the Anglo Catholic tradition
 on Ash Wednesday,
 to begin the Lenten season.

And in a sobering liturgy;
 the priest will place ashes on our foreheads
 with this startling reminder;
 “Remember o man, of dust thou art and to dust thou shall return”

So now in the midst of the Wonderful Season of Pre-Lent: What
 are St Paul, Jesus and Archbishop Morse telling us?

St Paul is writing to the Church he founded in Corinth
 It had been a long effort wrought with peril and danger
 But Paul had established a church
 And spent months nurturing it, growing it and loving it

But soon after he left to build other churches
 False evangelists swooped in behind him
 And were trying to undo all Paul had so painstakingly started
 They were preaching a false doctrine:
 That only Jews were welcomed
 into the Church of Jesus Christ

They claimed superiority by virtue of the fact that they followed the laws of Moses.

Even from the very beginning of the Church

In Christ there is no difference between Jew and Gentile

Or any ethnicity

Jesus welcomed all to His church.

A frustrated Paul rushed this Epistle to the Church

He begins this section by reminding that he is very legitimately a Jew and could claim the exclusive rights propounded by the interlopers.

Instead,

Paul continues and recounts with accuracy all that he endured
In bringing the church to the non-Jewish world.

And reminds the Corinthians

that it is by the power and the Grace of God

Not by our sole doings

That we all accomplish anything in our lives.

Paul is also remembered on this day

And in this rare Epistle in which Paul speaks of himself

Of all he endured for the love of Christ and His church.

The reminder comes as we contemplate a 40 day sacrifice for the wellbeing of our own souls.

And puts our efforts to shame

As we compare them to the complete self-giving of Paul.

Jesus gave us the parable of the sower of the seed.

It is one of only a few parables that Jesus explained.

He tells us that the seed represents the word of God in the parable

And shows that the Word of God will not resonate
with everyone equally.

It is only those who receive the Word and Jesus with honesty
And a good heart,
Who will keep the word
And bring forth fruit with patience.

It is only those who with honesty
And with an actual and true desire and intention
to make the Lenten sacrifice
who will know the great benefit of Lent.

Jesus' parables were not understood by everyone who heard them.
He rarely translated them into meaning
It seems that this one was so foundational to His doctrine
that He went out of His way to explain it.

Archbishop Morse urges that we use our minds in all matters
concerning the Church.
Our Lenten fast and discipline is no different.

Lent is a time and
a good long time
set aside each year in the Spring
for us to think about our lives
and our relationship with God
and our relationships with each other.

It is a time to assess
Where we have been
And where we are going
In those relationships.

In particular it is a time to assess whether there remains
 some sin that has not been forgiven.
 Some tarnish to our soul
 That is holding us back from a full relationship with God
 Or with each other.
 Some obstacle to the love of God in our lives.

Lent is a time of prayer:
 Prayers are the means Jesus gave us to converse with God.
 A necessity during Lent.
 The Lenten collect says it best.
 It is from 1549 and captures the letter,
 spirit and
 heart of the Lenten Season:

Create and make in us new and contrite hearts
 That we, worthily lamenting our sins
 And acknowledging our wretchedness
 May obtain of thee, the God of all mercy
 Perfect remission and forgiveness
 Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

This is a prayer that is said in each service and on each day
 from Ash Wednesday until Palm Sunday
 and one that is a great way to begin any Lenten discipline.

Lent is our 40 day journey to Resurrection
 We walk it step by step with Jesus
 From His triumphal entry into Jerusalem
 To the evening of the Last Supper
 The institution of Holy Communion our connection
 with Him
 His betrayal, His Arrest, The trials
 And His walk to His tortuous
 and painful death upon the Cross

On the 41st day we celebrate the Resurrection of Jesus, the Christ
 The glory and joy of confirmation of everything He ever said.

But on the 42nd day

With the celebration still ringing in our ears
 we may recognize our own Resurrection

Our own new life

New person

Tempered by the hard work of introspection

Disciplined by the rigors of the 40 days of Lent

We rise.

We rise to a new life

Unwilling to compromise our life with Christ

Committed to follow His will in our lives.

To love God with all our hearts minds and souls.

To love as Jesus loved us

We have 10 days

If you have not already done so; 10 days within which to make the
 time, find the silence to consider how you will spend your 40 days
 of Lent.

What will be your sacrifice?

Will you make a dietary sacrifice?

Will you forgo some daily activity and replace it with 30
 minutes of prayer, the Daily Offices (Morning and Evening Prayer)

Will you take on 30 minutes a day of Bible reading?

Study some aspect of doctrine

Study the life of a Saint

Read that CS Lewis book you have always wanted to read

Will you do something for a person in need?

Whatever your decision,

Begin and end the sacrifice each day with prayer

And maintain it in the spirit of love. God's love.

If you are able to make the sacrifice, and make the time to examine
your life

Ferretting out that spot of sin

Seeking absolution, the forgiveness of God

And make the journey to Easter

You just may change your life.