

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church
Septuagesima
February 16, 2025
rmcneely+

I grew up with 10 cousins. We lived not far from each other and they became my very best friends to this day.

But it was my grandmother who kept us all together.

She was widowed at a young age
and was an independent
and devout woman until the day she went home to God.

Her home was a gathering place for us.

Every birthday,
every holiday
was a joyous time with the aunts, uncles, the 11 cousins and my beloved grandmother.

We called her Boau.

A name that came from the first cousin and never changed.

During the Great War she served as a nurse to our troops
and so Boau, became the family medical advisor.

We all went to her for a cure of whatever was ailing us.

There was some kind of tonic that she determined was good for us.

It came in a brown glass bottle

and was a thick, black syrup

that was foul tasting

but apparently packed with the nutrition

and whatever else that maintained good health.

Periodically she would line up the 11 of us to administer a large spoonful of the goo.

The little ones squirmed to try to escape the stuff
but Boau raised 5 kids and tended to soldiers

and had a confinement hold
that somehow pinned our arms and legs
but left her free to pour the nasty stuff into our mouths.

She said it was good for us
and she loved us,
so we drank it.

Today's Gospel was kind of like that for me for a long while.
It was hard to swallow
but Jesus gave it to me
and so it must be good for me.

Today we enter the three-week season of Pre-Lent.
A time set-aside by the Church
to help us get ready for the rigors of the Lenten season
not too far away.

The Church changes to mark the time.
The altar and clergy are vested in violet.
The flowers at the altar tend toward violet.
The color of humility and penance.
The liturgy changes to reflect to somber tone of the season
The *Gloria in excelsis* is omitted
As are the *Alleluias* from the gradual
(the music between the Epistle and Gospel).

The hymns and anthems take on the somber tone of the season.
All to help bring us
closer to God
in this time of self-reflection and atonement
as we begin to work out our Lenten discipline.

To help get us started, the Church offers
 St Paul's famous analogy of an athlete
 And Jesus' parable of the workers in the vineyard.

Paul's athlete is like unto those competing in the Olympic Games
 A runner and a boxer.

He points out several attributes to us:
 Even though all the athletes race to win
 Only one can win the prize.
 So work to win says Paul.

Work to achieve your goal.

He notes that while the athlete's prize is one that soon withers and
 fades away:

A crown of laurel in Paul's day.
 The prize for which we compete is everlasting.

Paul counsels that the athlete runs with purpose
 Not errantly around the track.
 But with self-control.
 He works hard but with discipline,

The boxer Paul describes
 Does not train aimlessly.
 He does not wildly strike out at the thin air.
 He subdues his work to a purpose.
 He drives his body,
 training toward his goal.

In the same way Paul's athletes approach their competition.
 We can learn much from them as we approach
 Our Lenten discipline
 . In the same way Paul's athletes approach their competition

Jesus gave us seven parables that begin:
 "The Kingdom of Heaven is like. . ."

Perhaps the concept or the reality of Heaven
 is beyond our finite human minds,
 And the closest we can get is through parables.

The one in today's Gospel
 Begs some analysis and thought.
 When we look at it with 21st Century eyes, it seems grossly unfair
 That workers who toiled all day under the heat of the sun
 Should be paid the same wage
 As those who only worked an hour.
 The householder has violated
 the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act, among other things.
 Where is the union rep?
 Workers of the world unite!

How could Jesus be advocating such a result?
 Let's look at it with 1st Century eyes and maybe it will make more
 sense.

The scene is not unlike one that unfolds everyday here in San
 Francisco:

A householder goes to Home Depot or Lowes
 To hire workers on a one time or casual basis
 He agrees to an hourly wage
 And the workers come to the workplace
 and perform their labor.

The householder in the parable goes back several times during the
 day and hires workers.

When he hires the first workers in the beginning of the day
 There is an agreement to pay a penny for the day's work.
 Later in the day the agreement is for "Whatsoever is Right".

There is just one bit of context that we need to know to fully
 Understand this parable:

The wage of a penny a day
 Sounds to us as less than slave wages.
However, 2000 years ago a penny was a large sum
 More, even than the Roman soldiers were paid.
 It was far in excess of the prevailing wage of the day.

When the day ended and it was time to pay each worker his wage
The parable takes its first surprise twist:
 Those that had come to work last were paid first
And then the second surprise twist:
 Every worker received the same high wage.

So just what is Jesus telling us today?

The parable is this:
 The householder is God
 The workers are all of us
 The vineyard is heaven.
God seeks workers throughout the day.
 Good news for us.
 He is always reaching out to us.
 It is never too late in our lives to accept His love.
 Not even in the last hour.

The other takeaway from the parable is
 Some understanding of the enormity of God's Grace.
 That gift from God that brings us closer to Him.
Think of the wages in the parable as the Grace of God.
 It is given freely and abundantly
 To those who have been with Him all along
 And to those who have just joined Him.

We begin the Pre-Lenten season with the most comforting
assurance that it is never too late in our lives
 to receive God's saving grace.

Your faith in God will make the difference in the New Covenant
with Christ our Lord.

This Gospel message is tempered
on this First Sunday in Pre-Lent
by St Paul's Epistle for today.

That we must constantly run the race that is our lives, to win.
Because if it is never too late to receive God's grace
it is also never too late
to leave the narrow pathway to God
and to be damned.

So the medicine
which may have seemed a little hard to swallow,
now is more easily taken.

Take it.
Jesus loves you
and it is good for you.

