

Saint Thomas and Saint Thomas of the Air Church  
 Septuagesima  
 February 1, 2026  
 rmneely+

that we who are justly afflicted for our offenses  
 may be mercifully delivered by Thy Goodness

Septuagesima, Sexigesima, Quinquagesima

What the heck is a Gesima?

what is it doing in my church?

who spilled it all over the place?

and how am I going to clean it up?

I hear you ask.

“Gesima” is a Latin derivative meaning “Days”.

The Septua, Sexi and Quinqua all refer to numbers:

70, 60 and 50 respectively

So Septuagesima, Sexigesima and Quinquagesima

All refer to the number of days left before Easter

and today,

Septuagesima,

is to warn us that Easter is but 70 days away,

it is time to prepare

And the church points us toward the task ahead

And rather than abandoning us to our own devices

offers advice as to how we might approach it.

The Collect for the day recognizes the work ahead,

Acknowledges the affliction of our offenses

And prays for God’s goodness in delivering us from our sins.

In his Epistle, St Paul draws upon the example of two athletes.

Timely with the Winter Olympics beginning this week.

The Olympic games of Paul’s day were a Greek cultural,

Political and religious extravaganza.

People traveled from afar to Olympus on the Peloponnesian Peninsula  
to watch and revel in the games of Paul's day.

He points us to the discipline of a Runner.  
     He competes to win the single prize.  
     There was only one winner in Paul's day;  
         Nothing for the second or third finisher.  
     He is focused on a single goal.  
     Does not wander across the racecourse.  
 Every athlete strives for mastery of his sport  
     But he exercises self restraint,  
     moderation in all he does.  
 He competes for a crown of Laurel  
     Which withers, dries and crumbles.  
 But Paul reminds us that we compete for a crown that is unchangeable;  
     The forgiveness and love of God.

Paul then points us to the discipline of the Boxer  
     Who does not waste his energy mindlessly beating the air.  
     But who maintains discipline and keeps within his body.  
         He drives his body and trains it.  
     We too must keep within subjection to the discipline  
         And the goal.

Paul concludes that he must follow the discipline of the athlete  
     Lest when he stands before the people to preach  
     He is cast away from the narrow pathway to God.

Please let's turn to the Parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard:

Jesus and the Apostles are gathered on the shores of the Sea of Galilee  
 Peter has asked Jesus an awkward but oh so human a question  
 "What's in it for us  
 We have given up everything  
 What do we get in heaven?"

Jesus then gives them a series of 4 parables.

Jesus begins this one with: “the kingdom of heaven is like unto’  
And gives them the parable of the laborers in the vineyard.  
He does not directly answer their questions  
He gives them a parable to occupy their minds.

There are some things that we need to know in order to see it with First  
Century Eyes:

The wage offered by the householder of the vineyard is not the wage of a  
vineyard worker of the day.  
In the Greek it is a denarius.  
And is the daily wage of a Roman Soldier  
Much greater than what a day laborer of the time would be paid

The other thing is that some things never change.  
The laborers are gathered in a place where people seeking daily workers  
come to hire them  
Just as today we may go to Home Depot where men are gathered to be  
hired for the day. Employers come and select men to work for the day.

The householder makes several trips and hires workers throughout the day

Then the story presents the first of its mild surprises:

The householder returns to the labor pool at 5 o’clock  
What use could he have for men who could only work an hour?  
And how surprising that there were still men there  
so desperate for work  
that they remained all day  
hoping for a job,  
even one that could last only an hour.

We reach the end of the day  
And the next surprise;

The householder reverses the usual order of the paymaster  
 And calls forth the men who most recently arrived  
 And pays them first  
 Purposefully paying them while the others are waiting and observing  
 The usual order would have avoided the entire controversy  
 Upon payment to the first men,  
 they would have gone  
 and never learned that the last received the same wage  
 but that would have ruined the story.  
 And the point lost.

So the first workers complain.  
 Was it that the last workers were paid too much  
 Or that the first workers, who had already received more than the  
 common scale, should be paid even more?

The parable is discomfoting for us when we view it with 21<sup>st</sup> Century eyes  
 God violates the Federal Fair Labor Standards Act  
 It strikes us as unfair  
 Why should the men who only worked an hour receive the same wage as  
 those who toiled the entire long hot day?

Remember, Jesus told us that this Parable is about the Kingdom of  
 Heaven. So put away your worldly notions.  
 The Parable is about Heaven,  
 God's world,  
 not ours  
 of the here and now.

Think of:

The Householder of Heaven as --- God.  
 The vineyard of Heaven as God's --- Church  
 The labor to be done as the work for --- the church  
 Those who were first called to work in God's church as --- the  
 Children of God; the Jews  
 Those who were called later, as --- the Gentiles

The wages as --- God's grace  
Think of those things and the Parable begins to look differently all  
of a sudden.

God first called the Children of Israel  
to work in His Church  
and some responded to the call and worked;  
Planting His seed,  
watering,  
feeding  
and caring for the vines,  
pruning  
and weeding.

For these first called, there was an arrangement for their reward; a  
contract: one full day's work in return for a penny.

Much later, God called the Gentiles to His church  
and some responded  
and they served well.

But for these there was no arrangement. They were to receive  
“whatsoever was right.”

At the end of the day it was time to pay the Laborers.  
He ordered the last,  
the Gentiles  
to the front of the line  
to be rewarded first.

They received an equal measure with the Children of Israel.

Lastly, God then fulfilled his promise to the Children of Israel. But  
they had become jealous that God bestowed the same blessing  
upon the Gentiles and complained that they deserved more or the  
Gentiles less.

The Good News is that God does not work on a contract with us,  
does not become indebted in a bargain.

There is no mathematical formula,  
no point system  
that we can manipulate,  
by which we can earn our salvation.

There is nothing we can do  
by ourselves  
to be saved.

God's mercy is for the sake of His only begotten Son  
Not for the sake of our merits.

All who come to God with a right heart receive His grace;  
that gift from God that brings us closer to Him.

It does not matter to Him  
that you have been His all your life  
or whether,  
like the thief on the cross at Jesus' crucifixion,  
you become one with Him,  
shortly before death.

God explains all this to the First laborers  
whom he had rewarded last.  
And then God dismisses them from the vineyard, >>>> take  
your penny and  
. . . Go.

The laborer who responded to the call later in the day,  
who had no defined arrangement for reward,  
who would accept God's promise of  
"whatsoever is right"  
on FAITH IN HIM,  
he is the man God chose to remain in the vineyard.

To remain with Him in Heaven  
So with a new look at the Parable of the laborers,  
and hopefully a better understanding of it,  
perhaps it makes more sense.

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.

