

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

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 discomforting for us when we view it with 21st 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
“whatssoever 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.

