

Septuagesima Sunday
28 January 2018

“But about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing about, and he said to them, ‘Why do you stand here all the day idle?’” Mt. 20:6

This Sunday begins the period in the Church’s liturgy that indicates a transition between the joys of Christmas and Epiphany and the rigours of Lent. Pope St. Gregory the Great established these Sundays before Easter: Septuagesima (70 days), Sexagesima (60 days) and Quinquagesima (50 days) in order to prepare the faithful, both in body and spirit, for the Lenten period of penance. **“The Church through the appropriate liturgical texts, tries to make the Christian realize the misery of their state as sinners and their own weakness, in order to prepare them for the need of penance and unite them to the one sacrifice of Christ, which is commemorated in the Lenten cycle.”** (*The Preacher’s Encyclopaedia*, p. 586-7) The period of Septuagesima has been compared to the seventy years of Babylonian captivity where the Jews wept for their sins and longed to return to Jerusalem. So, too, the Church calls us to weep for our sins and long for the joys of the resurrection and of heaven. We see how this is true in today’s *Epistle* (I Cor. 9:24-27; 10:1-5) where St. Paul reminds the Corinthians to deprive themselves like good athletes in order to prepare for the struggle for the crown of eternal salvation: **“...but I chastise my body and bring it into subjection, lest perhaps after preaching to others I myself should be rejected.”** I Cor. 9:27 In the *Gospel* (Mt. 20:1-16) parable of ***“The Labourers in the Vineyard,”*** Jesus shows us how important it is to labour in His vineyard, that is, the temporal world, for the reward of the kingdom of heaven. All are invited to work in the vineyard: ***“Why do you stand here all the day idle?”*** Mt. 20:6 All are invited to work for their eternal salvation, and no one should be idle and careless in doing the things which will bring this great reward.

“Do you not know that those who run in a race, all indeed run, but one receives the prize? So run to obtain it.” I Cor. 9:24

St. Paul uses the analogy of the runner to show how one must train vigorously to win the prize of a heavenly crown. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, the Christian runs a spiritual race

that demands great effort: **“Even in the spiritual race, one only receives the prize—he who perseveres to the end. Run, then, for victory; (this) indicates first the effort, then the purpose, lastly the prize.”** (*The Preacher’s Encyclopaedia*, p. 588) Like all good athletes, St. Paul demands that the faithful who are aiming at the goal of eternal life should do penance and chastise their bodies lest they lose the eternal crown: **“...but I chastise my body and bring it into subjection, lest perhaps after preaching to others I myself should be rejected.”** I Cor. 9:27 St. Paul reminds his followers that it is not enough to belong to the chosen race. He reminds them that the Jews were brought out of Egypt and received great graces from God, but some sinned and died in the desert: **“Yet with most of them God was not well-pleased, for they were laid low in the desert.”** I Cor. 10:5 The lesson from St. Paul is self-evident: **“The Christian is an athlete; and it is not enough for him to cry Lord, Lord, from the gallery. He must be in the arena to fight for his life!”** (*The Preacher’s Encyclopaedia*, p. 489)

“Even so the last shall be first, and the first last; for many are called, but few are chosen.” Mt. 20:16

These mysterious words of Our Lord become clear when one considers the spiritual meaning of this parable in its allegorical sense. The vineyard is our life in the world where we must strive for the reward of our labours: instead of a denarius for our day’s work, we will gain eternal life. Quoting St. Gregory the Great and St. Augustine, Dom Prosper Gueranger in his book, *The Liturgical Life Vol. 4* says that the various hours of the day represent the stages of life: **“It signifies the calling given by God to each of us individually, pressing us to labour, during this life, for the kingdom prepared for us. The morning is our childhood. The third hour, according to the division used by the ancients in counting their day at sunrise; it is our youth. The sixth hour, by which name they called our midday, is manhood. The eleventh hour, which immediately preceded sunset, is old age. The Master of the house calls His labourers at all these various hours.”** Gueranger, p. 126 All those called must go at the time when they are summoned as they are not certain that they will be called later. The same happens to us in life: no one is certain that he will live to old age. We need to accept the call to live our faith when we are called. We also need to accept the wage which we are

promised. Interestingly, the denarius is a coin comprising ten other coins; so the good Christian must keep the Ten Commandments if he hopes to save his life. Jesus calls all to the kingdom of heaven, but not everyone accepts the invitation. Some who thought that they were special because they came first, may be last; and those who were called last, may be first in the kingdom of heaven.

***“Have I not a right to do what I choose?
Or art thou envious because I am
generous?”*** Mt. 20:15

When the first labourers came for their wages, they reasoned that they should have a higher wage since they had worked all day. In reality, they were envious of the good fortune of those who worked only part of the day. It seems to be another example of the typical reaction of the Pharisees at Jesus’ generosity to sinners and other non-Jews. Fr. Boylan in *“The Sunday Epistles and Gospels,”* explains it thus: **“The Pharisees were like the early hired workers; they had professed to walk in the ways of the Lord, and for their ‘works of the Law’, they thought themselves fully entitled to demand payment, as wages earned, from God. Against this outlook the parable is a protest. The Kingdom of Heaven has been offered to all—but in the goodness and mercy of God, and not as a wage definitely earned by work done. Those who might have expected to enter it first of all are likely to be the last to do so, and those whom the Pharisees despised—the ‘people of the land’ and sinners—are among the first to enter the Kingdom.”** p. 131 The Pharisees are the people to whom Jesus often refers in the scriptures who want special favours for being His followers yet they lack His spirit: **“We ate and drank in thy presence, and thou didst teach in our streets.’ And he shall say to you, ‘I do not know where you are from. Depart from me all you workers of iniquity.”** Lk. 13: 26-7 Let us be thankful for having been called to be a follower of Christ, and let us wish that all our fellow men would also accept Jesus’ call even if it is at **“the eleventh hour”**.

The Capital Sin of Envy

Envy implies sorrow at the happiness and prosperity of our neighbour. For which reason the envious man is never without sadness or trouble. Are his neighbour’s fields green and fertile? Is his house a happy one? Is he not lacking interior and spiritual happiness? All these signs of prosperity increase the illness and disturb the mind of the envious man. St. Basil tells of the evil effects of

envy: **“The envious man is hurt by the good fortune of a friend; the joy of his brothers causes him pain; he cannot look with favour on the riches of another and considers the prosperity of his neighbour as a misfortune for himself. If he wished to tell the truth, he would be forced to confess this; but since he does not wish to make it manifest, he keeps this hatred in his heart, where it gnaws away at his entrails.”** St. Basil, **“Homily 11 on Envy”**

Addenda

What are the Capital Sins? There are seven capital sins: pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth.

Which are the six sins against the Holy Ghost?

1. Presumption, 2. Despair, 3. Resisting the known truth, 4. Envy of another’s spiritual good, 5. Obstinacy in sin, 6. Final impenitence (From *The Penny Catechism*)

The First Friday, 2 February 2018

Now is a good time to continue (or begin) the devotion to the **“Nine First Fridays”** of the Month. The Sacred Heart of Jesus promised to St. Margaret Mary: **“I promise thee in the excessive mercy of My Heart that My all-powerful love will grant to all those who communicate on the First Friday in nine consecutive months, the grace of final penitence; they shall not die in My disgrace nor without receiving the Sacraments; My Divine heart shall be their safe refuge in this last moment.”** There is no better way of honouring the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus than in receiving Holy Communion on the **“Nine First Fridays.”**

The First Saturday: 3 February 2018

Our Lady told Sr. Lucia in 1925 **“...I promise to assist at the hour of death, with all the graces necessary for salvation, all those who, on the first Saturday of five consecutive months go to confession and receive Holy Communion, recite five decades of the Rosary and keep me company for a quarter of an hour while meditating on the mysteries of the Rosary, with the intention of making reparation to me.”** If only we would do what Our Lady asks, we would be assured of eternal salvation. Our Lady promises us all the graces necessary for our salvation if we keep ***The Five First Saturdays!***

St. Maximilian Kolbe on Our Lady

"Let us entrust to the Immaculate our entire being, all the faculties of our soul, that is to say, our intellect, our memory and our will, all the faculties of our body, that is, all of our senses and each one individually, our strength, our health or our infirmity; let us entrust to Her our entire life and all of its events whether they be pleasing, displeasing or indifferent. Let us entrust to Her our death, in whatever moment, place or way it may happen. And lastly, let us entrust to Her all of our eternity." (SK #1331)

"All graces come to souls from the hands of the Mediatrix of all graces and there is not one instant in which new graces are not flowing into each soul: graces to enlighten the intellect, to fortify the will, to spur us on to do good; ordinary and extraordinary graces, graces directly regarding temporal life and the sanctification of the soul." (SK #1313)

Confession

Every time that you intend to approach the sacred tribunal of Penance, think of the unspeakable sorrows which the sight of your sins caused Mary's heart. Place yourself at the foot of the cross, and full of confidence, beg her to let you share Her feelings of humility, of sorrow and of abandonment to divine justice, to which She surrendered Herself for your sake.