

Septuagesima Sunday- EF Dcn. Pat Hall 2016
Matthew 20: 1-16



Today we celebrate Septuagesima Sunday. So-called because we are within 70 days of Easter. Easter is the pinnacle of our liturgical year. It gives us hope and promise.

But our Epistle today is one of caution. We hear:

But with most of them God was not well pleased.

Well, that's disconcerting. For all of their practices and lip service, most of the Hebrews in the desert had failed in their faith in God. They had gone through the Red Sea, ate of the manna from Heaven and drank from the Rock of Meribah. Their faith broke... and with that, their relationship with God.

It is these people from their ancient history whom Paul compares the Corinthians of his time. They could share in the same baptism, the same spiritual food and drink and yet not have the faith to dedicate themselves to the Lord and his mission. They perform with less effort than an athlete who competes for a corruptible crown.

Half-hearted efforts or just plain going through the motions will not win the incorruptible prize.

We need to be open-eyed to those dangers in our spiritual practices of our day.

Our Church provides much that can guide us in our path, much that can open our heart to God's presence. We offer the discipline of weekly Mass. We call our people to penitential practices on Fridays, the day of our Lord's crucifixion. We call for yearly minimums in reception of Holy Communion and Confession. We challenge the faithful to support materially the ministries of the Church.

Undertaken, these disciplines help us incline our hearts to the Lord and encourages us to walk in the Way. And yet, if we fail to open our hearts to God, if we fail to open our hearts to each other, we risk being left behind, like those Hebrews in the desert who never got to see the Promised Land.

So much lip-service given... only in the end to wind up with nothing.

And yet, we contrast this message to the Corinthians with our parable about the workers in the vineyard.

Those who showed up and worked in the 11th hour received the same reward as those who had been toiling all along. Of course, this is a direct allegory of obtaining the rewards of Heaven. Even late in the game, a sinner can convert. One can accept Christ in their heart and obtain blessed eternity.

Remember the robber?

*And he said to Jesus: Lord, remember me when thou shalt come into thy kingdom.
And Jesus said to him: Amen I say to thee: This day thou shalt be with me in paradise.
(Lk 23: 42-43)*

I liked Msgr. Ronald Knox's take on this when he said:

*Septuagesima has an epistle which warns us that it is never too late to be damned,
[and] a gospel which tells us that it is never too late to be saved.ⁱ*

Being right, doing the right thing at the right time is important. I dearly strive for that ideal. But transcending being right is having right relationship.

Scripture is clear that we cannot earn our way to salvation. There is no amount of good works that can pave our walk to Heaven. We are offered Heaven freely, if only we choose to return God's love with our love.

Love involves adoration. Adoration inspires us to act in love. Love is more a free will active choice than it is a passive reactive feeling, though they are not exclusive of each other.

How sincere is the profession of love to another, if it is not followed by acts of love?

Shew me thy faith without works; and I will shew thee, by works, my faith. (Js 2:18)

So where can I find Jesus, so as to love him?

Right here. Every time you come to Mass, you have the right to hope and expect an encounter with the Risen Lord. Is our weekly reception methodical? Jesus calls us to enter into his very life right here at this altar. Do we come with the openness to allow Jesus into our very heart?

Jesus also tells us to look for him in the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick and the imprisoned. (Mt 25:35-36)

God tells us that in loving him we must love each other.

I remember talking to my Dad in his last remaining years about his biggest disappointment. While all us brothers love our father dearly, my dad's greatest heartache was that we all did not love each other, that we had allowed entrenched rancor to sour our relationships with each other. I'm happy to say that much of it had been resolved to his happiness before he passed away and with much improvement since. My Dad inspired us to choose to love each other.

May Jesus inspire us in much the same way:

A new commandment I give unto you:

That you love one another, as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

(Jn 13:34)

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ⁱ Robert Knox, *The Epistles and Gospels for Sundays and Holydays: Translation and Commentary*, p. 96