

SEPTUAGESIMA (prelent-1)

Hymns: 380, 447, 453, 370

The INTROIT

(Ps.18:4,5,6:18:1,2)

P: The sorrows of death compassed me;
C: the sorrows of hell compassed me about.
P: In my distress I called upon the Lord;
C: and He heard my voice out of His temple.
P: I will love Thee, O Lord, my Strength;
C: the Lord is my Rock and my Fortress.

The COLLECT

O Lord, we beseech Thee favorably to hear the prayers of Thy people that we, who are justly punished for our offenses, may be mercifully delivered by Thy goodness, for the glory of Thy name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Savior, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end,

The FIRST LESSON

Jeremiah 1:4-10

Then the word of the LORD came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.

Then said I, Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.

But the LORD said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the LORD. Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.

The GRADUAL

(Ps.9:9-10;18-19a)

P: The Lord will be a Refuge for the oppressed, a Refuge in times of trouble: and they that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee; for thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek Thee.
C: For the needy shall not always be forgotten; the expectation of the poor shall not perish forever. Arise, O Lord; let not man prevail.

The EPISTLE

1 Corinthians 9:24- 10:5

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud

and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

The TRACT

(from Ps.130:1-4)

P: Out of the depths have I cried unto Thee, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice.

C: Let Thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication.

P: If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?

C: But there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared.

The HOLY GOSPEL

St. Matthew 20:1-16

For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way.

Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle?

They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us

He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first.

And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day.

But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?

So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.

1 Corinthians 9:24- 10:5 — “So Run, That Ye May Obtain”

INTRODUCTION

I. BUT ONE RECEIVETH THE PRIZE

II. SO RUN, THAT YE MAY OBTAIN

III. AND WERE ALL BAPTIZED INTO MOSES

CONCLUSION

1 Corinthians 9:24- 10:5 — “So Run, That Ye May Obtain”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you all from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today is Septuagesima. The Epistle appointed for this day is 1 Corinthians 9:24 - 10:5:

Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

Upon examining the three primary appointed texts for this day, one could arrive at the conclusion that today is preacher appreciation day. The three pericopal readings are all about preachers. However, the appreciation is not of the type that silly people who have forgotten the true definition of preaching exhibit by appointing a National Clergy Appreciation Day (October 9, 2011) or other such emotionally loaded exhibitions, but rather appreciation in the sense that something is made to appreciate or increase in value. We apply this sense of the word to houses and property, and today’s texts use this sense with regard to those who have been entrusted with an office far too high for them ever to be able to make themselves worthy. However, the texts also raise our sense of awareness as to the value of this holy office. So then, we shall listen to the words of St. Paul regarding this marvelous gift to the Church, the gift of the preaching of the Gospel.

I. BUT ONE RECEIVETH THE PRIZE

Today’s Epistle reading begins with the words: **“Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize?”** These words do not teach what most imagine. If we hear these words without remembering the purpose for which St. Paul is writing, we hear these words from a false understanding.

What is St. Paul’s purpose for writing this letter? Is it not to address the unholy and anti-Christian divisions that the members of the congregation have chosen for themselves? Is it not to call the congregation to repent of these divisions, being called back to the singular foundation by

which Christ's Church stands unmoved and united? Is it not to call the congregation back to the one true faith by which salvation and everlasting life are imparted to us poor sinners?

So then, with this in mind, what does St. Paul really mean when he writes: **“Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize?”**

First, consider the word that is translated as *“a race.”* The word is *stadio*, from which we have *stadium*. A *stadion* is a measured distance. In this context it is the appointed course for the race that is to be run. It has an appointed beginning point and a final destination point. There is only one course. It is exactly the same for every runner. These runners have been appointed or chosen to follow this course. One course for all. All who are called or appointed run this same course.

Secondly, the Corinthians all know this. They have known this for all of their lives. Thus St. Paul uses the perfect tense which means that they have known and continue to know this. The implication that accompanies this is that they also have known and continue to know the point that the apostle is about to make concerning the one true faith by which the Church exists and sinners are brought into the life of the Church. This is the one knowledge that they received when the Gospel was first preached to them and they were baptized into the kingdom of God, the body of Christ, the Church of God on earth. There is only this one knowledge or understanding. There are no variations. One and only one doctrine stands as the foundation for the holy communion of the saints.

Thirdly, there is only one prize and only one runner receives it. In the next sentence he speaks of the crown that is received as the prize. There is only one crown and only one recipient of that crown.

How, then, does this apply to the Church? If there is only one crown, who will receive the crown? St. James uses this same terminology, saying: **“Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.”** (James 1:12) In the Revelation given to John, the Lord Jesus declares:

And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive; I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.
(Revelation 2:8-10)

In both of these texts, the actual reading is: **“the crown of the life.”** There is one crown. There is one life. There is one appointed course. Only one runner receives this crown. There are many who have been set upon the course. Many run. Only one receives the crown of the victory, the crown of the life.

II. SO RUN, THAT YE MAY OBTAIN

The apostle continues, saying: **“So run, that ye may obtain.”**

The members of Christ's body are one. The apostle speaks to us as one. There is one crown. We all are to receive this same crown together as one.

This is the point that true preachers of the Gospel understand. If the true Gospel by which all men must be saved is to be preached, the preachers must be appreciated or increased in value so as to understand this. There is one crown and only one crown to be awarded. It is the same crown for all. This is what the Lord Jesus explains in today's Gospel reading. There is not a different wage that is to be paid for those who have been Christians longer. There is not a larger payment to be given to those who have done more in the Church or who have studied harder or who have given more offerings or who have witnessed to more people. The Church is one body, the body of Christ. All who are truly members of this body, whether they were baptized as babies and lived their entire lives as members of Christ's body, or if they are like the thief on the cross and receive the gift of the true faith with their dying breath, they receive the same crown of the same life.

Jesus is the life. He is also the crown. Life with Jesus begins with being regenerated into the kingdom of God. All who are brought into God's kingdom through Baptism share in this life together all their days on this earth, finally receiving the award that the Lord Jesus purchased for all and gives freely to everyone who is counted as a member of His body.

This is why St. Paul says, "**So run, that ye may obtain.**" Ye is plural. All of us together are to run this course with the understanding that there is one crown that we shall receive together.

This changes the way that we run. Doesn't it? If we are running with the understanding that we are running together and not as individuals, does this not change the way in which we run the race? If we are running with the understanding that all of us are to cross the line together as one body, do the feet try to find a way to get ahead apart from the rest of the body? Of course not. The entire body runs as one and the crown is placed upon the entire body. Christ is our head. He is the crown that is placed upon us. He is the life that we receive together. He is our goal, our finish line of victory.

Thus we gather together for the divine service and we worship as one. We kneel as one and confess the same confession of sins. We receive together the same absolution. We pray the same prayers. We are led ultimately all to the same table to receive the same Supper of Life.

This is the race or course that we are all called to run together as one. This is what St. Paul says that he as a preacher needed to be certain that he would not forget.

And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

He says that he gives an eye punch to his body and enslaves it. This same word for "eye punch," *hupopiazo*, is used in the parable of the unjust judge and the widow who continually came to him with her request for vindication.

Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. (Luke 18:5)

The concept is that through constantly hitting the judge in the eye with same request the widow finally wore him down and broke his resistance to doing what he knew to be right and true. St. Paul is saying that as a preacher of the Gospel, he does the same to himself. He punches his body in the eye with the truth so that it does not turn aside to imagine that he is somehow different or better or higher than the rest of Christ's body. St. Paul is telling us to beware of the same temptation in our lives. This is especially needful for pastors and teachers. The same Gospel is needed by those who preach and teach as for the rest of the people. In fact, because of the temptations that come with the holy office, the preachers and teachers are even more needful of this eye-punching.

In Matthew 6:22 the Lord Jesus says: **“The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.”** He says that the eye needs to be single. The word that He uses means single or simple or whole or pure. In other words, the focus is upon only one thing and is therefore clear and without compromise.

This is the way for the Church. Together we have our minds fixed on the things above, seeking the things that are where Christ is, as St. Paul writes also to the Colossians. (Colossians 3:1)

III. AND WERE ALL BAPTIZED INTO MOSES

The reading continues into chapter ten.

Moreover, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea; And did all eat the same spiritual meat; And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

Being baptized all together, eating the same spiritual meat, and drinking the same spiritual drink, this is the course upon which all saints have been set together from the very beginning. This is the way of the Church. This is the way for those who are in Christ.

Can St. Paul be any more clear regarding the necessity of the Sacraments for our life in Christ? Yes. In verse fifteen he becomes as clear as it is possible to be.

I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we *being* many are one bread, *and* one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. (1 Corinthians 10:15-17)

Is this not the understanding that St. Paul is teaching us regarding how we must run the race? Is this not the very means by which God accomplishes this for us?

Why then do we seek unity by other means? Why do we seek worthiness apart from the preaching of the Gospel and the reception of the Sacraments? Why do we allow the preaching of the Gospel and the administration of the Sacraments to be compromised and to be treated as

something less than they are?

Truly we need to punch ourselves in our eye to drive our focus back to the means of grace and the gathering where these means are not adulterated. In this way we will run so as to receive the crown and not be disqualified.

Surely the example of those who have gone before us, both those who fell away and especially those who continued on the straight path, should be that from which we learn.

CONCLUSION

On this day of Septuagesima, this beginning of the countdown representing seventy days before the resurrection of our Lord, this is a wonderful text to be appointed and handed down to us to hear. Surely our focus during this time is the forward looking to the fulfilment of our redemption and the seal of acceptance of the payment made with Christ's blood for our forgiveness and restoration into God's Holy Communion. Surely the course has been set before us. Surely the gracious call of God is that together we shall run this course, carrying one another on some occasions, being carried ourselves on other occasions. Surely when one falls we shall lift that one up to come to the Holy Supper to be strengthened again in the unity of the body of Christ and His forgiveness and life. Having heard the Gospel preached to us yet again we now prepare to come by Christ's invitation and command. We come to His Table where He feeds us His Supper. Together we bend the knee and hear the blessed words of our salvation. Together we sing the ancient words of the Agnus Dei, the Lamb of God. Together we pray the prayer that our Lord Jesus gave and commanded. Together we hear spoken His words of consecration. Together we eat and drink, being bound to Christ and one another, being renewed again together in His forgiveness and mercy and everlasting life. Together we receive the promised crown of victory. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus forever. Amen.