



THE MISSION OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

Father Alan's Blog

For the Sunday Called Septuagesima – February 13, 2022

"I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you..."
St. Matthew 20:14 (NIV)

Reaching the end of a job interview, the Human Resources person asked a young accountant fresh out of university:



"What starting salary were you thinking about?"

The neophyte accountant said:

"Oh, I suppose somewhere in the neighborhood of \$100,000 a year, depending on the benefits package."

The interviewer replied:

"Well then, what would you say to a package of: 5 weeks' vacation; full medical and dental coverage; Company Retirement Fund to 50% of salary; Executive Share Option Scheme; Profit-Related Pay; AND a company car leased every 2 years – say an 8 series BMW?"

The novice accountant sat up straight and exclaimed:

“Wow! Are you KIDDING?!?”

To which the interviewer answered:

“Yes, but you started it.”



To be sure, a “servant’s heart” is sorely lacking in our materialistic society today.



Nevertheless, God’s people, especially, should possess – first and foremost – a *servant’s heart*.

But first, a little background:



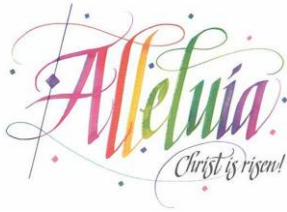
The three Sundays before Lent – collectively known as the season of “Pre-Lent” – are called Septuagesima, Sexagesima, and Quinquagesima. The Latin names for these Sundays signify that they are, approximately, the seventieth, sixtieth, and fiftieth days before Easter, respectively.

Both Pre-Lent, and Lent that follows it, are times of **penance**, with Pre-Lent being a time of **voluntary** fasting in preparation for the **obligatory** Great Fast of Lent. Pre-Lent is meant to call us back from our Christmas and Epiphany feasting and joy, preparing us for the fasting and humiliation in the approaching season of Lent.

(Thus, sobriety and somberness reign liturgically. For example:



the “Gloria in Excelsis; and



the word “Alleluia”

and are banished or “put away” and are not to be said again until the Vigil of Easter on Holy Saturday. This is also why:



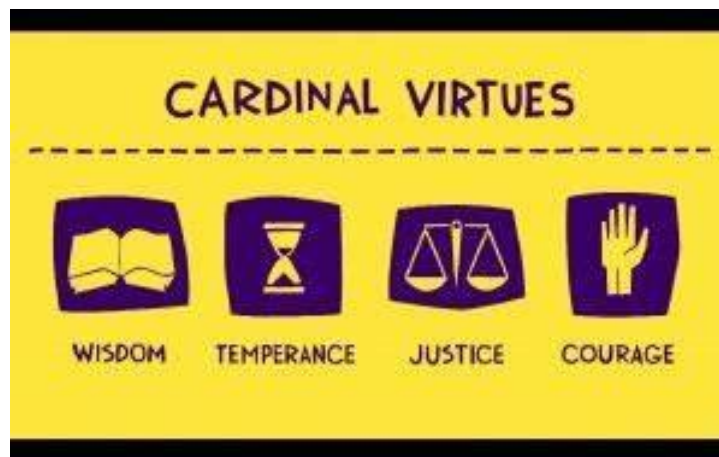
purple vestments

have been traditionally used during this season.)



In addition, the Epistle and Gospel Lessons appointed for the three Pre-Lenten Sundays encourage us to reflect upon the **virtues** that are necessary for “holiness of life”, (such reflection being necessary at this time, as the **renewal of holiness** is the **object** of our Lenten fast.)

A virtue, quite simply, is a **good habit**; it is the settled, established disposition of the soul to act properly and well. While there are some virtues which relate strictly to the operation of the intellect – such as sanity and artistic skill – there are others which relate to the mind as it guides our natural desires and our power of choice. These are known as the cardinal (or principal) **virtues**, of which there are four, and they make our acts upright, decent, and honest:



These four cardinal virtues were known to the ancient world and adorned the lives of many notable pagans. As such, they were seen as **acquired virtues**, ingrained in the soul by ceaseless practice and hard discipline. (Their aims – no matter how noble – were strictly natural, however, and pertained to humans’ happiness in their earthly lives.)

Conversely, with our baptism into Jesus Christ, come other virtues of which human effort is **incapable**. Known as the **infused virtues**, they are planted and nurtured by the Holy Ghost in the souls of Christ’s members, for the purpose of their supernatural happiness and eternal blessedness. Chief among the infused virtues are:



These three virtues – faith, hope, and charity (or love) – are also known as the **theological virtues** and through them the Holy Spirit gives all Christians an **aptitude** for holiness of life. Still, this aptitude and potential for holiness must find “expression and perfection” in our everyday activities. Hence, the theological virtues of:

Faith • Hope • Charity

are expressed and perfected through the:





The Church teaches us about virtue most clearly during Pre-Lent through her choice of “Propers” (or readings) for Holy Communion.

For today, “The Sunday Called Septuagesima”, we are asked to consider the two Cardinal virtues of:

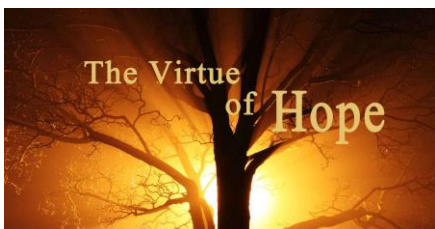


; and



,

And, theologically speaking:



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St. Paul speaks quite vividly about temperance in today’s Epistle Lesson from 1 Corinthians 9:24-27. He compares the Christian’s struggle against the desires of the flesh to competition in the athletic contests so popular among the ancient Greeks. Just as the runner or the wrestler restrains his or her appetites for:



so that he or she may earn a laurel crown and win human honour, in the same way, the Christian must govern his or her appetites with:



so that he or she may obtain the “crown of glory” and see God.

Now, this is not to say that food, drink, and sexual relations in and of themselves are wicked things; rather, they are gifts of God and are, therefore, good. Nevertheless they were made for **certain purposes**. And to use them either **more** or **less** than those purposes require – or even **apart from** those purposes – is a sin against temperance. The abuse of food and drink is the sin called:



And the abuse of sexual desire is the sin called:



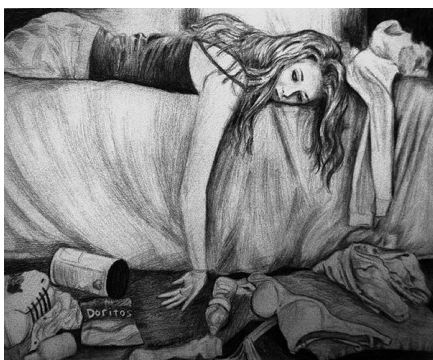
(Of note, fasting – or **self-denial** – is a useful discipline against both gluttony and lust.)



Furthermore, temperance (for the Christian, anyway) is a practical expression of hope. “Hope”, simply put, is the desire of the faithful soul for the Kingdom of Heaven, and it makes itself felt in action by the prudent control of the bodily desires, lest the Christian become entangled in the things of this world. Or, as St. Paul puts another way, in today’s Epistle Lesson (1 Corinthians 9:24-25):

“Run in such a way as to get the prize, a crown that will last forever.”

Conversely, the opposite of hope is “despair”, and despair is born of:



sloth;



spiritual apathy; or



boredom.

In short, those who are slothful, spiritually apathetic, or bored:



neither hope for heaven nor fear hell.

(Is it any wonder, then, that it is those who are slothful, spiritually apathetic, or bored who often commit the wicked deeds which so unsettle our civilization today?)



Today's Gospel Lesson from St. Matthew 20:1-16 is about justice – **God's justice.** In "The Parable of the Labourers in the Vineyard",

Jesus tells the story of the owner of a vineyard who hired labourers first thing in the morning, and then as He felt the need at succeeding hours throughout the day. The first group hired agreed to work the whole day for a penny, which evidently they felt to be a fair wage. The succeeding groups all agreed to work what remained of the day for whatever the owner should feel was fair. At the end of the day, the owner paid all the labourers a penny, whether they had worked for only an hour or for the whole day. Those who were hired the earliest complained that this was unfair; however, in making his reply the owner made two points:



First, each labourer received everything to which he was justly entitled by the pre-arranged agreement; and



Second, the owner's money was his to dispense as he wished.

If the owner felt that it was fair to pay the last labourer hired the same wage as the first, then it was his right to do so. In both cases, then, justice was satisfied.



Justice is shown in our steady determination to give each person his or her right (or due). And justice comes from the principle that we are not valuable for:

WHAT WE DO ;

or for **what**

WE OWN ;

but, rather, for

WHO ARE WE

(or, more specifically, for **WHOSE we are** – because each of us was created by God for Himself; thus, we all have a God-given right to whatever we need to help us grow closer to Him).

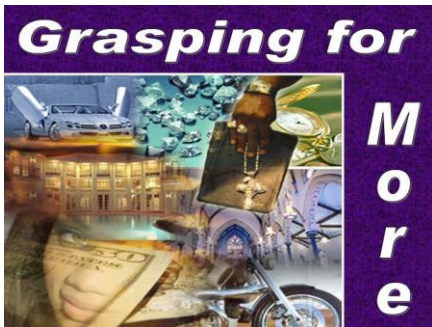
Justice governs all relations between and among people; in fact, **justice is the basis of all social life.**

In opposition, envy is the vice – or sin – most opposed to justice (as it is to charity, for justice is the concrete expression of charity). Envy begrudges another person that which is rightly his or hers. Likewise, the sin of covetousness is also directly opposed to justice (in so far as justice so often has to do with fairness in our dealings with others).

And both vices:



envy; and



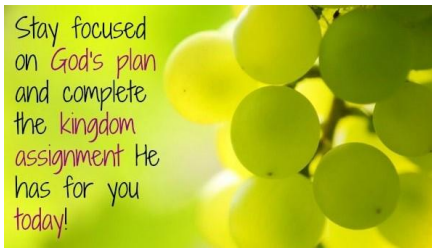
covetousness,

can be seen in the reaction of the ten-hour workers in today's Gospel Lesson, upset because the one-hour workers got the same wage.



It is imperative we realize that Jesus is the landowner Who hires people to work in His vineyard.

Now, let's think on that for a moment:

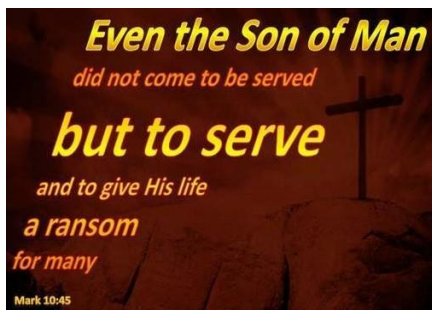


God literally invites us to participate in the building up of His Kingdom.

And not because *He has to*, either.

(For He Who created everything in the blink of an eye could do a much better job in building up His earthly Kingdom by Himself, thank you very much.)

Therefore, we ought to consider – and to answer – a very important question:



Are we more interested in being served or being a servant?

Or, as I said earlier:



Having a servant's heart?

Case in point:

One day, a first grade teacher asked her students:



"What do you do to help out at home?"

One little girl replied:



"I dry the dishes."

One little boy answered:



"I sweep the floor."

Another little girl responded:



"I feed the dog."

Every student in the class had something he or she did to contribute at home, except for one little boy who was sitting in the back. Looking at him, the teacher asked:



“And what do you do to help out at home?”

Sheepishly, he said:



“I just try to stay out of the way.”



That’s a real problem in the Church today, for far too many church members just “stay out of the way”. And yet, day after day, week after week, Jesus invites ALL of us:



us mere HUMANS,



us miserable SINNERS,

to pitch in, to **contribute** (which is simply amazing in and of itself).



Some people respond “first thing in the morning”. These people literally spend their entire lives knowing God and serving Him.



Other people “spend a difficult morning”, living much of their lives outside of God’s vineyard, but respond to His invitation later in life. Oh, their knees may be a little more skinned, their backs a little more bent and scarred, but they eventually become earnest servants of the landowner.



And then there are those who “spend virtually their entire lives” outside of the safe confines of the vineyard before being hired on to work in God’s vineyard *one hour before quitting time*.

Yet, here’s the Good News:



Everyone who accepts God’s loving offer to work in His vineyard gets the same wage.



Not a meagre penny – or Roman denarius,
(as we read in today’s Gospel Lesson, St. Matthew 20:1-16), but rather:



ETERNAL LIFE.

And despite the fact that we – who have been saved for much (if not almost all) of our lives – want to complain and to shout:



“Unfair!”

About the “Johnny-come-latelys”, as Christians we should get down on our knees and thank Almighty God that His love is powerful enough to overcome anyone’s sin (even – and especially – our own). As St. Paul so eloquently proclaims (Romans 5:8):

“But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

It’s really hard to fathom, but Jesus, God the Father’s only Son, voluntarily left the splendour of heaven for an agonizing, earthly existence, and suffered an excruciating death for all of us unworthy sinners so that we might live with Him in heaven **forever**.

And EVERYONE who responds to God’s loving invitation gets hired on to labour for the rest of their lives in God’s vineyard – whether:



for a century; or



for a second,

and, in accordance with God’s justice, **the pay is exactly the same:**



ETERNAL LIFE.

However, those who respond to God's loving offer "later in the day" (that is, those who come to faith later in life – perhaps at the eleventh hour or, even, at the moment of death), their personal hell is to bear:



the shame; and



the hurt

of living the vast majority of a life in this world ignoring God's call.

People such as these have missed out on much of the joy that God had planned for them in this life; as a result, they deserve our:



; and our

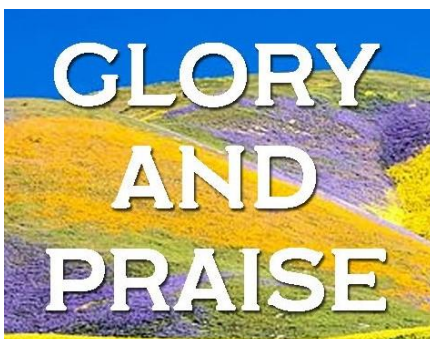


but definitely not:



our condemnation.

And Almighty God – **ALONE** – deserves all the:





**For at the end of the day, all we who labour in His vineyard
get to go home to be with our Father.**

Therefore, as Christians – **as children of God** – we are called to do our utmost to ensure that every single person we encounter be given the opportunity to respond to God's loving invitation to labour in His vineyard **as a direct result** of all our:

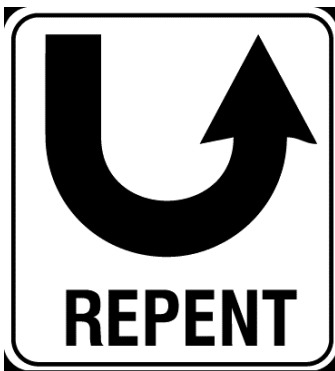
thoughts
words and
deeds.

More to the point, we are called to:



hope and pray

that everyone, regardless of their sins – **or how often they committed them** – will be moved to respond **positively** to God's gracious offer; in short, that they will:



earnestly repent; and



be spiritually converted; and



become sincere labourers in God's vineyard,

and that they, too, will receive God's full and eternal payment when the day's labour is done:



ETERNAL LIFE.

Which is far better than any:



8 series BMW.



Dearest Reader in Christ:

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