

Septuagesima

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 January 2024

Preacher: Father Randall Russell

[0 : 00] In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Let's get something straight right from the very beginning.

This morning's gospel is not about economics. It is not about how to run a business, or how employers should treat their employees.

No, this morning's gospel is about the kingdom of heaven. And the kingdom of heaven is not like the kingdoms of the earth. It is not based upon merit.

It is not based upon work experience, professional recommendations, or even results. It is based upon grace.

However, this should not give anyone the impression that the kingdom of heaven does not involve work.

[1 : 02] On the contrary, no one in the kingdom of heaven is called to stand idle. Everybody works. No one is idle.

It is just that the pay, or the reward that is received, is not based upon how long anyone labors in the vineyard of God.

And this is very important to keep in mind before we all enter the season of Lent. Because today is Septuagesima Sunday. Which means that we now only have about 17 days or so to go before the beginning of Lent.

And around 70 or so days to go before the celebration of Easter. For Septuagesima Sunday is the beginning of what is known as pre-Lent.

A time when we are all called to prepare ourselves for the fast and for everything else that will take place during the season of Lent. For pre-Lent is kind of like a warm-up or a good stretch before the great race begins.

[2 : 15] A time when we are all called to get into the right frame of mind and prepare ourselves for all those spiritual exercises that are very soon to come.

Therefore, pre-Lent begins today with a reminder of God's grace. For it doesn't matter how long a person has toiled or labored in the kingdom of heaven.

For all those who serve in the kingdom of heaven will receive the same reward. Eternal life and the bodily resurrection of the dead on the last day.

The only question is whether or not we will grumble and complain when we see so many latecomers come to the faith and receive the same reward.

For instance, when Easter finally comes, will we say things like, Oh, I haven't seen those people in church since Christmas.

[3 : 15] And where were they when the church's heater went out? Or when we needed help with this or that? Or on the day of judgment? On the day of judgment will we exclaim, Wait, Lord.

You're granting eternal life to him? He's a criminal who spent his entire life committing only the most heinous crimes. And you're telling me that just because he truly repented in the last hour before his execution, he's now going to receive the same reward as I, who have served you for so very long. How is that fair? To which I imagine our Lord will respond the same way as the master of the vineyard responded in this morning's gospel.

He will say, Friend, I'm doing you no wrong. If I wish to give to this last man the same as to you, is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things?

Or is your eye evil? Because I am good. For it's not up to you or I to determine what God should or shouldn't do with his own things.

[4 : 35] We are not the judge. He alone is. But then, then why do we toil? Why do we labor?

Why do we worship and fast and give alms and pray? Well, and this is important. All of these questions are things which Easter simply cannot answer, but which the season of Lent most certainly can't.

For we toil because the master of the vineyard bids us to toil. We labor because God has simply called us to be faithful, to be faithful laborers in his kingdom.

We worship God because God alone is worthy of worship. And we fast and give alms and pray because Christ has told us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow him.

For it is through our Lord's denial of himself that our world was forever changed. And it is through our denial of ourselves that our world continues to change, continues to be transformed, and continues to grow in all the righteousness of almighty God.

[6 : 02] For ultimately, salvation is not just about me, myself, and I. And it's not just about you either.

It's about us. And it's about our neighbors. And salvation is about the world, the cosmos, and all things.

To say that we love God but could care less about our neighbor or less about our fellow laborers in the kingdom of heaven because we're just waiting to get paid and to receive our eternal reward.

Well, that isn't honest. That's not how this works. No one can say, I love God, who also thinks nothing of his neighbor and nothing of the rest of the world.

And that, my friends, is something that only Lent and not Easter can teach us. Showing us that our toil and labor, our life of self-denial and service to others, is just as valuable as is our eternal reward.

[7 : 27] For you simply cannot have one without the other. Therefore, let us all strive to get into the right frame of mind before Lent begins by remembering that God is gracious and that we are all called to act in accordance with his grace, all called to labor in his vineyard.

For today is Septuagesima Sunday and pre-Lent, pre-Lent begins now. In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Ghost.

Amen.