

# Sexagesima

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[ 0 : 00 ] Lent or pre-Lent, which are the Jesima Sundays that we are currently observing, are often a time to begin thinking about what we will give up.

Will we give up beer for Lent? Will we give up chocolates for Lent? Or maybe you're like me and giving up broccoli for Lent. It's good to begin thinking about such things as a part of our discipline. It helps us to focus more intently upon Christ throughout this holy season that precedes Easter. Sacrifices are noble acts of devotion.

However, I'm going to suggest that we should be asking to receive and not be merely fixated on giving up certain things for Lent.

And the two things that I think we should be asking to receive are, first, ears to hear and hearts to receive the Word of God. And second, lives to live out the Word of God as we strive in holiness to bring all glory and honor to our God.

[ 1 : 13 ] In our Gospel reading this morning from Luke chapter 8, we heard that familiar story or parable that is often called the parable of the sower.

A better title for this parable in Luke chapter 8, I believe, is the parable of the soils. You see, there are four different types of soil in this parable.

We read that a sower goes out and he sows seed. The first lands away from the path and the birds come and devour it.

The second lands on rocky ground, which means that some of the seeds sprout for a short time, but then it withers away because it lacks moisture.

It dies. The third type of seed lands in the thorns or the thistles. This seed sprouts, but the thorns choke the growing crop out and it dies.

[ 2 : 15 ] The final seed lands on fertile ground, good earth, and it blossoms and it grows. Our Lord then interprets this parable by saying that the seed here represents the Word of God.

So the seed is the Word of God. The sower is none other than our Lord himself. And each soil represents our hearts.

The first seed falls outside the path. The birds of the air represent the realm of the diabolical or the demonic. The devil comes and he snatches away the seed so that there is no heart for God.

The second seed falls on the rocks, which represents a heart that has become callous to the Word of God. You see, this seed sprouts for a short time, but then it dies because it has no roots.

This is symbolic for those who are often caught up in the emotions of religion or spirituality, but have no depth. There's no rich earth to sustain growth.

[ 3 : 29 ] And this is what we see in much of American Christianity today, where psychological and emotional manipulation is used to elicit some response from the listener in order to get a crowd, grow a church.

Apart from the tradition and practices of the ancient church, people often leave the faith because there is no real substance.

There's no depth. Everything is totally shallow. In other words, there is a falling away from the Lord. Once all the excitement ends, the hoopla is gone.

Once the new gimmick is over. The third seed falls in the thorns or the thistles. This is when the world's priorities replace a commitment to the faith, which is then choked out.

This is when people begin thinking and behaving in the same way as the world. There is no difference. This is when people live lives of pure selfishness, focused only on self, seeking to be pampered rather than sacrificing oneself for God and neighbor.

[ 4 : 49 ] It's when church becomes the last priority on the family calendar, and the sacraments are secondary to one's own entertainment or fun.

It's also a time that when the trials come, adversity hits. Instead of trusting in Christ, putting our faith in Him, one becomes bitter and hardened to our Lord.

Jesus says that the cares, the riches, and the pleasures of this life now replace the desire to grow and to mature in Jesus Christ.

The final seed falls on good ground. Fertile soil, rich earth. This represents those who hear the word of God and then seek to keep God's word by bringing forth good fruit with perseverance and with patience.

I began by saying that we shouldn't be merely looking to give things up for Lent. We need to be asking our Lord to give us virtues and disciplines to implement as a part of our Lenten practice.

[ 6 : 06 ] Absolutely. But what we should really be asking for, based here on our gospel text, is that the Lord give us ears to hear and hearts that desire Him above all things.

We should then ask for a deeper devotion to our Lord, seeking to be more earnest in practicing our faith, going deeper, not just settling upon the surface or the shallow.

The first of the Ten Commandments says, Thou shalt have no other gods. The Lord is to be our only God.

He is to be first in all that we do or all that we seek to do. Therefore, dear people of God, ask the Lord. Ask the Lord to give you understanding that you might hear the word of God.

Ask that the Lord then help you to apply the wisdom of His word and living a life of trust, a life of faith, a life of obedience, not being led by just mere circumstances in which we find ourselves.

[ 7 : 27 ] Ask our Lord to go deeper into the sacramental life of the church, to do works of charity towards others, and to continually say no to ourselves, to practice self-discipline so that our Lord might receive our sacrifice of thanksgiving and striving to live a life of holiness.

Dear friends, may our prayer echo those words that we just sang in our sermon hymn. Lord, keep us in your steadfast word. Defend your holy church.

Support us in our final strife and lead us out of death to life. This is the prayer of one whose heart is like the good soil.

This is the prayer of one that longs for God. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Ghost. Amen.