

Septuagesima Sunday

The Work of Salvation

"Go you also into the vineyard" (Matt., 20:4)

The Gospel of today reminds all of us of a most important obligation --our obligation to work out our eternal salvation. This is compared to labour in a vineyard. The labourer has the obligation to put his best efforts into the task assigned to him. If he is idle or does his work carelessly-he has no right to a salary. On the other hand, if he works faithfully he has a claim in justice to the remuneration promised him by his employer. So too, if we perform as we should the task assigned to us by God in the present life, the task of serving Him and obeying His commandments in our particular state of life, we shall receive the reward of life eternal. If we fail to perform this task properly, we must expect God's punishment and rejection from the happiness of Heaven.

There is one mysterious element in today's Gospel, the apparent unfairness on the part of the employer. He paid the labourers who had worked only one hour as much as he paid those who had laboured all day. The explanation is that he gave to these latter the full amount agreed on, but then in his generosity gave the same amount to those who had worked only one hour. The lesson which Christ wished to teach is that even those who recover God's grace a short time before death receive the essential reward of heaven, the everlasting vision of God, which is the same reward that is given to those who have served God faithfully all their lives. However, from other passages of the sacred writings we know that in heaven, though all receive the same essential reward, the measure in which each will find joy and happiness in the beatific vision differs in proportion to each one's good works in the present life.

The Church assigns this Gospel to be read on Septuagesima Sunday because today we begin the solemn and serious period of the Church's year which will last until Easter. Lent does not begin until two and a half weeks hence, but the violet vestments that are worn by the Priest today and the next two Sundays indicate that the Church wishes us to do penance for our sins, and to meditate frequently on the great purpose of life, the work of our eternal salvation.

St Thomas on the way to council in Lyon. What is the most important thing to hope for?

We can never think too seriously of the immeasurable importance of living in such wise that when death comes we shall be prepared to receive the reward of life eternal.

Practical Application

Ask yourselves honestly if you would be prepared today in the event that God called you to eternity. Let no consideration of temporal honours, material wealth or sensual pleasures prevent you from the main objective of life, the attainment of life eternal