

[send this](#)[bookmark](#)[print](#)[close](#)

The Parish Paper

OF
ST. JOHN'S CHURCH
SAVANNAH, GEORGIA

Vol.33 No.10

Feast of the Purification (transferred)

02/03/02

Septuagesima, Sexigesima, Quinquasema I

The Prayer Book names this season Pre-Lent. The readings appointed for these Sundays reach back all the way to the sixth century and maybe farther. They reflect the gradual development of the Church Year, and include influences from both the Christian West and East.

Even though the Sundays of Pre-Lent count the days to Easter, Septuagesima - seventy, Sexagesima - sixty, and Quinquagesima - fifty, the genius of these Sundays appears in how they connect with Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany, and then also with Lent and Easter. This twofold direction of meaning is the reason why the gesima Sundays have been called Janus days, liturgical days which look backward in recollection and forward in intention, like the two faces of the Roman god Janus.

Looking back from these gesima Sundays, Advent, Christmas, and Epiphany teach us the beginnings of Christianity. Advent waits expectantly for the coming of the King of Israel. Christmas celebrates the King's advent in becoming man, the indissoluble union of God and man in Christ Jesus. Epiphany marks the manifestation of the King, the God-man, to the Gentiles, and how God through Christ now shines forth in His adopted children.

Looking forward, the gesima Sundays point to Ash Wednesday, Lent, Good Friday, and Easter. Ash Wednesday anoints our mortality with heartfelt repentance. Lent, Good Friday, and Easter follow the way of our Lord's own sacrifice, which begins with the temptation of Jesus and ends in the agony of Golgatha and in the glorious victory of Resurrection.

Why, then, the gesima Sundays? They provide the gateway from Epiphany to Ash Wednesday. Pre-Lent turns the soul, adopted in Christ, to go after Him - in faith, hope, and charity. The gesima Sundays show how we who have been included in Christ grow confidently in the knowledge and love of our Father.

Septuagesima grounds us in faith. Faith is the first moment of spiritual motion in Christ toward our Father. It is not, as much of our present world considers faith, a sheer wishfulness and willful-ness, devoid of reason. Faith seeks the true knowledge of God. And, therefore, Septuagesima teaches us the truth about God, that He is Good, and the very source and origin of everything that is good. The parable of the laborers in the vineyard wipes away all our self-justification, and

moves us to trust and depend upon the goodness of God, whose mercy is His undeserved gift. When Thomas Cranmer looked for an introit psalm for this Sunday, he chose the twenty-third. "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." And so, with St. Paul, the child of God runs the race of faith that wins the incorruptible crown of His goodness. Septuagesima instructs us in faith.

Sexagesima nourishes us in hope. In the parable of the sower and the seed, the Word, received and kept in a good heart, is fruitful in the things of the Spirit. The Word supplies all the faithful soul needs to know of the goodness of God. Confident in the power of the new life of the Word, the soul grows strong against diabolical adversity, and shuns the manifold pre-occupations of the world. The heart set on His goodness becomes more and more good itself. With such hope, Paul was delivered by God's power through many hardships and perils. For Sexagesima, Cranmer chose as his introit the twenty-fourth psalm, which speaks of the creative and protective power of God. "The earth is the Lord's, and all that therein is, the compass of the world, and they that dwell therein. For he hath founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the floods... Who is this King of glory? It is the Lord strong and mighty, even the Lord mighty in battle." After faith in the goodness of God comes hope in the power of God.

Quinquagesima unites us to God in love. Charity is finally the "very bond of peace and of all virtues." Faith in the goodness of God and hope in the power of God are nothing at all, if love does not unite us to our Father. Only love can move us to go after the Lord "up to Jerusalem." Charity alone binds us to Christ as He is mocked and scourged and put to death. We are like the blind man, whose faith seeks the healing of his sight, whose hope is in the power of Jesus to heal, and whose love now follows Him, glorifying God, all the way to Jerusalem and Gethsemane. "Charity believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth." For Quinquagesima, Cranmer chose the twenty-sixth psalm. "Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try out my reins and my heart." What moves us to possess the end of our journey is love.

Faith, hope, and love are the motions of the soul in the season of Pre-Lent. They are the energy of new life in Christ, the spiritual lifeblood of the adopted children of God, guiding the mind and filling the heart. There is no life of the Christian apart from the reality of these virtues, for they are the very life of the soul, turning, converting, to God. The gesima Sundays provide for this conversion, and with Ash Wednesday and Lent, these virtues under-go greater purification.

And so the question must be asked, "Why would the liturgists of the modern age do away with the gesima Sundays? Does not the modern world need faith, hope, and charity?"

The Rev. Dr. Michael L. Carreker

[send this](#)

[bookmark](#)

[print](#)

[close](#)

Report Errors | Comments

Copyright 2003 - 2004 St. John's Episcopal Church in Savannah, GA. All rights reserved.