**LECTIONARY FOR THE WEEK**

**FROM EPIPHANY V TO SEPTUAGESIMA**

**(Feb. 13 through Feb. 20)**

  **MORNING EVENING**

Feb. 13, Sunday (Third before Lent, commonly called Septuagesima)

1st Lesson Genesis 1:1–2:3 Genesis. 2: 4--end

2nd Lesson John 1: 1–18 Mark 10: 1–16

Feb. 14, Monday

1st Lesson Gen. 3 Gen. 4: 1--16

2nd Lesson Matt. 15: 29–16: 12 Romans 1

Feb. 15, Tuesday

1st Lesson Gen. 6: 5—end Gen. 7

2nd Lesson Matt, 16: 13—end Romans 2

Feb. 16, Wednesday

1st Lesson Gen. 8: 1–14 Gen. 8: 15–-9: 17

2nd Lesson Matt, 17: 1–13 Romans 3

Feb. 17, Thursday

1st Lesson Gen. 11: 1–9 Gen. 11: 27–12: 10

2nd Lesson Matt. 17: 24–18: 14 Romans 4

Feb. 18, Friday (Day of Abstinence)

1st Lesson Gen. 13 Gen. 14

2nd Lesson Matt. 18: 15—end Romans 5

Feb. 19, Saturday

1st Lesson Gen. 15 Gen. 16

2nd Lesson Matt. 19: 1–25 Romans 6

Feb. 20, Sunday (2nd before Lent, commonly called Sexagesima)

1st Lesson Gen. 3 Gen. 5: 5--end

2nd Lesson Mark 9: 33—end Luke 17: 20--end

**SEPTUAGESIMA**

In ancient times, this Sunday, approximately 70 dsys before Easte.r, was when adult converts were enrolled for Baptismal instrution. Easter itself was the occasion for Baptism; Lent was primarily a period of instruction. That bit of background sheds light on the Epistle and Gospel appointed for this “Third Sunday before Lent.”

In today's readings we have the Christian life compared to (1) running a race, (2) toiling in a vineyard, and (3) receiving a reward. C. S. Lewis has written in the Screwtape Letters of the “Law of Undulation” in the spiritual life. At times the life of faith is like running a race, but mostly it is just toiling in a hot vineyard. But to concentrate on the reward, the parable makes it quite clear that the reward which God bestows on the Christian is absolutely a matter of His sovereign grace. The householder is not in the least reluctant to appear inconsistent, arbitrary, even unfair. “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with my own? Is thine eye evil because I am good?” The whining complaints of those who have labored the entire day miss the point that the householder is, above all, generous. He has graciously made a place in his vineyard for the laggards who have wasted the day in the market-place.

The whole idea of grace has all too often been trivialized into a tawdry secular notion of “unconditional love.” That understanding of grace (really a misunderstanding) would rewrite the parable to say that the householder forgets his vineyard, joins the laggards in the market-place, and at the end of the day divides his entire fortune with them. A false gospel which promises everything and requires nothing will quickly have a large audience; churches which proclaim such a message will always have full parking lots.

In today's Epistle we hear one of St. Paul's most solemn statements: “lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.” Those are words which must make us stop and think! The great apostle himself seems to contemplate a possibility of losing his own soul. That was the real danger, not just for those left behind in the market-place (how many were there whom the householder did not invite?), but even for those who “have borne the burden and heat of the day.” Those whining ingrates are the Biblical paradigm for zealous Churchmen who never learn the Good News of Unmerited Grace.

As we approach Lent with its blessings and its demands, the Householder Himself comes to us, inviting us to leave the market-place of our spiritual sloth and come into His vineyard. “Many are called, but few are chosen.” Are you one of the many or the few? LKW

**SEXAGESIMA**

These Pre-Lenten Sundays have unusually distinctive Collects. And in case you are not familiar with the term *Collect*, this word is the name for brief prayers which sum up or “collect” the private petitions of God's people; that is why there is or should be a slight pause between “Let us pray” and the Collect itself, to allow for the people to pray silently for a moment.

On Septuagesima and Sexagesima, the proper collects strike a solemn, almost sad, tone. Today we pray to be “defended from all adversity.” Last Sunday, we acknowledged that such “adversity” sometimes comes as the “just punishment for our offences.” These two prayers (BCP pages 118 and 120) might well be read together as examples of authentic Christian prayer. Those who learn to pray this way are not instructing God, giving Him good advice, sharing information, or even telling Him how they feel or what they want. They are simply asking to be defended against all adversity and mercifully delivered by God's goodness.

These two collects are among the most ancient prayers in the Prayer Book. They seem to have been composed in the Sixth Century A. D., just after the fall of the Roman empire, at the time when heathen barbarians from northern Europe were moving aggressively into Italy, leaving disaster and destruction in their wake. Whereas the Church had enjoyed a measure of safety and security in the last days of the Roman empire, now the world seemed to be collapsing. It was a perilous time, marked by pestilence, famine and earthquake. “Adversity” was not just a word.

The parallels between that period and our own are striking. Like the Roman Christians of the Sixth Century, we also perceive that our inherited world order may well be slipping away. But here is the great difference: whereas the Christian community of the early Dark Ages understood matters in solidly Biblical terms of God's just judgment on a sinful world, modern Christians seem to have a knack for making excuses and finding others to blame. We point to the liberals (both religious and political), we denounce the secular culture, we find fault with almost everyone and everything other than ourselves.

he Scriptures tells us that Divine judgment begins with the house of God. We are not here to play; the service of God is serious business. We know what God will do with the wicked, but what is in store for the shallow and superficial? Are you ready for Lent? LKW