

# Homily for Sexagesima

*Preached at St. Bartholomew's, Woodinville, WA Sunday, January 27, 2008*

- I. As we go from the darkness of Winter to the gradual dawning of Spring, so we turn from celebrating Christ's Incarnation and Epiphany to the application of his transforming power in our lives. During the 3-Sunday season of pre-Lent we learn that it is good to worship God and to adore what God has done, but that we must also cooperate in the work he has for us to do. In last Sunday's Gospel the question was asked, "Why stand ye here all the day idle? Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right, that shall ye receive." The Epistle reading for last Sunday pointed to the need for endurance, self-discipline, and moderation in this work. Our life's work in the Kingdom is not something that will happen in sudden burst of activity, but it will unfold over time, much as a distance marathon (not just a brief sprint). Today's scripture lessons assure us that we will not be left alone to work in peace for the Kingdom. No, we will be beset on every side by obstacles and hindrances, sometimes in hardship, and at other times in plenty.
- II. **Today's Gospel (St. Luke 8:4ff)** As usual, the agrarian culture underlying the Bible enriches our understanding of life, giving us a more complete perspective on life than our sterile, petroleum based, post-industrial culture is able to. *A sower went forth to sow his seed.* The seed reaches many places, but in most circumstances, there were obstacles that prevent the seed from growing to maturity: there are birds that snatched the seed away before it could take root (representing the Devil, who comes quickly to take away the desire to serve God, replacing it with doubts and excuses); there is the rocky, hard-packed soil that does not afford enough depth for the plants to mature (this represents those who have ears and can hear the word of God, but their hearts and minds are too hardened to respond, and they reject the word...it just bounces off); there are choking thorns (this represents the cares and riches, and pleasures of this life: hedonism, overabundance and lack of self-discipline). There is just as much peril prosperity as there is in adversity. The great American novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, is set in the unbridled prosperity of the "roaring" 1920's. In the story Jay Gatsby battles to regain the affection of a vain, self-absorbed woman named Daisy Buchanan, who has rejected him in favor of a wealthy man. Over time, Gatsby becomes wealthy himself –obscenely wealthy. He has a larger house and more cars and servants than anyone, and he throws lavish parties all with the purpose of luring Daisy and trying to capture her heart once again. The novel describes a world of leisure and wealth: palatial estates, endless parties, dancing, jazz music, alcohol; it describes a world of boredom, disillusionment, affairs, betrayals, adulteries. Jay Gatsby has a neighbor, who helps him get back in touch with Daisy, but who is bothered by her vanity and by the sound of her voice. Struggling to pinpoint what it is that bothers him, he observes to Gatsby, "Her voice is indiscrete". But Gatsby, the long-suffering suitor replies, "It's money. Her voice is full of money". Now we tend to think of money as liberating and enabling: "If only we had more, think of all the things we could do!" But the Gospel points out that far from liberating us, inordinate wealth can choke out our life and consume us, so that we die inside even while we appear to be flourishing on the outside. Now for the good ground: *But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience.* Notice that we are not only to have good intentions, but to actually hear the word and keep it. We are to bring forth fruit with patience, because we will face hardships. It is easier not to cooperate with Christ; it is easier not to allow growth in our lives; it is easier to let the Devil take the seed away, or for the soil to become hardened, or for the thorns to grow and choke the seed. To actually hear the word of God, to keep it in an honest and good heart, and to patiently bring forth fruit under his care, are all activities that require us to go against gravity.
- III. We notice also, the perils enumerated by St. Paul in **Today's Epistle (2 Cor. 11:19ff)** that he faced as a Christian Apostle: labors, stripes, deaths, beatings, stoning, shipwreck

(he was a day and a night floating in the Sea), all kinds of peril, weariness, pain, hunger, cold, nakedness. This too is quite far from our experience today. My definition of “peril and hardship” is missing out on my morning coffee! As American Christians in 2008, we do not know the meaning of hardship. We suffer from the opposite danger: the “cares and pleasures of this life”. Lent will be very good for us because it will require us to take on more disciplines such as prayer, fasting and almsgiving.

- IV. **Today's Collect** - Lest we become discouraged, the Collect for today reminds us that we are not alone in our struggle. “Mercifully grant that by thy power we may be defended against all adversity...” We pray for deliverance from all types of adversity. It reminds me of our Litany, in which we pray, “In all time of our tribulation, in all time of our prosperity...*Good Lord, deliver us.* Good soil does not happen by accident: it requires tilling, watering and weeding in order for the crops to grow. Christ is the gracious Gardner who tills the soil of our hearts, breaking down the rocky soil; he the Sower who sows the seed; he is the lowly migrant Worker who pulls out the weeds and he is the scarecrow who drives away the hungry birds. It is our privilege and joy to cooperate with his transforming work in our lives, even when it is difficult, for he will bring the work to completion and bring forth a good work in us, for his glory and for our joy.