

The season of Septuagesima comprises the three weeks immediately preceding Lent. It forms one of the principal divisions of the liturgical year, and is itself divided into three parts, each part corresponding to a week: the first is called Septuagesima; the second, Sexagesima; and the third, Quinquagesima. These words tell us that the great solemnity of Lent is looming in the distance, and as being the great object towards which the Church would have us now begin to turn all our thoughts, desires, and devotion.

Now, the feast of Easter must be prepared for by forty days of recollection and penance. The Forty Days of Lent are one of the principal seasons of the Liturgical year, and one of the most powerful means employed by the Church for exciting in the hearts of her children the spirit of their Christian vocation. It is of the utmost importance that such a season of grace should produce its work in our souls - the renovation of the whole spiritual life. The Church, therefore, has instituted a preparation for the holy time of Lent. She gives us the three weeks of Septuagesima, during which she withdraws us, as much as may be, from the noisy distractions of the world, in order that our hearts may be more readily impressed by the solemn warning she is to give us at the beginning of Lent by marking our foreheads with ashes.

The joys of Christmastide seem to have fled far from us. The forty days of gladness brought us by the birth of our Emmanuel are gone. The atmosphere of Holy Church has grown overcast, and we are warned that the gloom is still to thicken. Have we, then, for ever lost Him Whom we so anxiously and longingly sighed after during the four slow weeks of our Advent? Has our divine SUN of justice, that rose so brightly in Bethlehem, now stopped His course, and left our guilty earth?

No so. The Son of God, the Child of Mary, has not left us. The Word was made Flesh in order that He might dwell among us. A glory far greater than that of His birth, when angels sang their hymns, awaits Him, and we are to share it with Him. Only, He must win this new and greater glory by strange, countless sufferings; He must purchase it by a most cruel and ignominious death: and we, if we would have our share in the triumph of His Resurrection, must follow Him in the Way of the Cross, all wet with the tears and the Blood He shed for us.

The grave, maternal voice of the Church will soon be heard, inviting us to the Lenten penance; but she wishes us to prepare for this 'laborious baptism,' by employing these three weeks in considering the deep wounds caused in our souls by sin. True, the beauty and loveliness of the little Child born to us in Bethlehem, are great beyond measure; but our souls are so needy that they require other lessons than those He gave us of humility and simplicity. This Victim of the divine justice has now attained the fullness of His age; the altar, on which He has to be slain, is ready: and since it is for us that He is to be sacrificed, we should at once set ourselves to consider what are the debts we have contracted towards that infinite justice, that is about to punish the INNOCENT ONE instead of us - - - THE GUILTY.

It is evident, therefore, that the Christian, who would spend Septuagesima according to the spirit of the Church, must make war upon that false security, that self-satisfaction, that are so common to effeminate and tepid souls, and produce spiritual barrenness. It is well for them, if these delusions do not insensibly lead them to the absolute loss of the true Christian spirit. He that thinks himself dispensed from that continual watchfulness, which is so strongly inculcated by our divine Master, is already in the enemy's power. He that feels no need of combat and of struggle in order to persevere and make progress in virtue should fear that he is not even on the road to that kingdom of God, which is only to be won by violence. He that forgets the sins which God's mercy has forgiven him, should fear lest he be the victim of a dangerous delusion. Let us during these days contemplate our miseries, give glory to our God, and derive from the knowledge of ourselves fresh motives of confidence in Him; Who, in spite of all our wretchedness and sin, humbled Himself so low as to become one of us, in order that He might exalt us even to union with Himself!