

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Our text for meditation this morning is really is a bridge between two major accounts. ...

What occasioned our text was Jesus' comments after a rich young man went away sad.

The man had asked Jesus, "**Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?**"

To which, in part, Jesus answered, "**If you would enter life, keep the commandments.**"

The man then responded, "**All these I have kept. What do I still lack?**"

Again Jesus replied, "**If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me.**"

At which point the man walked away sorrowful because **he had great possessions.**

After a little more conversation, Peter chimes in with our text, and he is curious about something.

As follows in Jesus' name:

Then Peter said in reply, "See, we have left everything and followed You. What then will we have?" Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for My name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first.^(ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

So it would seem that what St. Peter heard from Jesus was a promise to this man,

if he sold off everything and gave it to the poor and followed Jesus,

he would be perfect, lacking nothing, and have certainty of eternal life.

And St. Peter notices, "Hey, we have done that. What will be our reward?"

"Was Jesus really saying, that there is a way to secure your salvation through actions of your own... that you can manipulate God into having favor with you, so that He must grant you heaven?"

...

What is interesting is that Jesus does not flat out tell St. Peter that that isn't the way God works.

Instead, He answers his immediate question, telling him that the 12 apostles will **sit on 12 thrones in the new world, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.**

We get a glimpse of this in the Revelation of Jesus Christ to St. John where we read,

Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and seated on the thrones were twenty-four elders, clothed in white garments, with golden crowns on their heads. ^{Revelation 4:4}

12 of these would be the Apostles, their writings and teachings about Jesus serving as the basis for judging the faith of the Church.

But Jesus goes on to offer up a little more information, not just about the 12 apostles,

but about all who forsake this corrupted world, **who have left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands for His name's sake.**

The reward for doing so is rather generous, isn't it?

They **will receive 100-fold and inherit eternal life.**

That, dear fellow redeemed, is an awesome return on your investment, isn't it?

A little bit of temporary sadness as you leave behind your home, family, and possessions, (For Jesus' sake)

for eternal joy as you gain the protection of the Almighty, the family of Christ, & the Kingdom of God.

And yet, that is not how God sees it.

Did you notice a major difference between what the rich man asked,

what good deed must I do to have eternal life?,

and what Jesus said about what your reward would be, that you would **inherit eternal life?**

An inheritance is not earned by what you do, but given.

So the one who leaves home, family, or lands, he is not earning eternal life, but is gifted it.

And to help us understand how this works in God's eyes, you heard that often repeated saying from Jesus, **the first will be last, and the last first.**

Did you also note that line was in the Gospel appointed for this Sunday, too,
in the parable with the Laborers in the vineyard?

That is not surprising because our text is the end of chapter 19,
and the parable is the beginning of chapter 20.

It's a very unfortunate chapter break, because our text is the immediate context for Jesus' parable.
So Jesus bookends His parable with this odd saying, **the first will be last, and the last first?**

To help us understand what is going on, we need to briefly consider the parable.

Those laborers hired at the beginning of the day were upset

because those who had worked only one hour **were made equal to them**... receiving equal pay.

... Those first hired were the only ones to make an agreement with the landowner about their pay.

But they had incorrectly thought or assumed that they were earning their wages.

To them, being in the Church was a "*quid pro quo*" relationship — a "this for that" association.

But the landowner rejects this thought completely.

It was by grace that He chose them to work in His vineyard.

It was even by grace that they were diligent early risers, eager to work in the vineyard.

It was by grace that He hired them and offered to pay them.

It was by grace, even with their confusion about their work, that He kept them in vineyard.

It was by grace that He corrected their misunderstanding so that they might learn what grace is.

Just as it was by grace that the Lord went out looking for those hired at the 3rd, 6th, 9th, and 11th hours.

Just as it was by grace that He generously/graciously gave them all a denarius.

And it would appear that those who were hired last would be the first to recognize... and appreciate
that gift of grace, understanding very clearly that they had not deserved it at all,
thus having a very clear understanding of the true Christian faith.

Dear fellow redeemed,

The Lord has called each and everyone one of you by grace,

whether at the beginning of your life, in the middle, or in your later years;

whether you labor throughout the day/week serving in the Church, at the school,

on a board or committee, in one of the clubs, or just come to the Divine Service;

whether you are given wholly to the support, work, and care of the Church, or occasionally.

It is a significant temptation in the Christian's life to forget the nature of this grace given to us.

And often, the longer you spend time in the field,
the more it can feel like work, like you are bearing the burden and the heat of the day;
the more it can feel like you are laboring to earn a wage, to earn eternal life.

The temptation is there because this is our natural default theology.

It's what makes sense to us... It's what seems the most fair.

If, by my sinful thoughts, words, and deeds, I incur God's displeasure and earn the wages of sin,
then it would seem logical that I can get myself out of that mess by doing the opposite,
that I can behave myself, speak and act kindly and earn back the right to eternal life.

This is what the rich young man was thinking.

He thought that he could **do a good deed to earn eternal life**. He didn't see it as a gift.

And yet, even when Jesus gave him a good deed to do, eternal life came at too much of a cost.

This is what St. Peter was thinking, when he asked, "**What then will we have?**"

I doubt that when Jesus called St. Peter and the others that they were thinking,

"Hey, we're going to be earning eternal life."

I am sure that they were just ecstatic that Jesus had called them to be His followers,
and that they would have the opportunity to continually hear the Gospel from His sacred lips.

But then as time went on, as they labored in the vineyard their expectations seemed to change.

We start hearing the evangelists report about them bickering among themselves
(on multiple occasions) about which would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven.

To think of Christianity as a way to earn eternal life is a serious danger to your eternal life,
because it minimizes the gravity of sin, and what is more, minimizes the graciousness of your Savior.

It doesn't meditate on how He alone has borne the burden and guilt of your sins to the cross,

or how He has suffered and endured the heat of the day in hell's furnace,
receiving the true wages that you have earned.

or how He was the one who tread out the grapes of God's wrath and drank it down to the dregs.

Nor does it recognize God's love and compassion in sending His only-begotten Son in our flesh
to fulfill and complete the law perfectly for you,

so that you could be declared perfect, and lack nothing for your certainty of eternal life.

But meditating on these things is exactly what's needed when laboring in the vineyard gets wearisome.

When you are tired of trying to keep the commandments, or the workload weighs you down,

or you fear that you yet lack something,

it is good to go (pointing at the Sacrament o/t Altar) and taste the fruit of His labor in the vineyard,
not drinking mere wine, but His holy, precious blood poured out for the forgiveness of your sins.

There you get a healthy, refreshing portion of His forgiveness and grace once again

as He fills up your cup to overflowing, more than enough to continue the work for the day.

Seeing Jesus' undauntedly go to the cross as a labor of love for your eternal life invigorates faith.

It puts the joy back into your labors as you see God's grace upon you.

And what joy it gives to have that gift shared with so many as we all gather together

(no matter at what hour we were called, whether first or last or somewhere in-between)

to receive God's grace, equally undeserved, but equally blessed.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria