



The Sunday called Septuagesima, or the  
third Sunday before Lent.

*The Collect.*

**O** LORD, we beseech thee favourably to hear the prayers of thy people; that we, who are justly punished for our offences, may be mercifully delivered by thy goodness, for the glory of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost ever, one God, world without end. Amen.

We now enter upon a transition period of Pre-Lent separating the joyous season of Christmas/Epiphany and the penitential fast associated with the Lenten Season. Septuagesima is exactly sixty-three days before Easter. Sexagesima is fifty-six prior, and Quinquagesima forty-nine. We owe the designation of the three primary Sundays before Lent to St. Gregory the Great, and to his rendering the first lectionary readings for the church calendar. Though he was called Pope, he was rather the Bishop of Rome who was a devout minister and a leader of his people. He opposed the Lombard invasion and successfully concluded a treaty with them. He saw Italy through great famine and epidemics of plague and other diseases. He compiled the Gregorian Sacramentary out of which many of our Collects are taken. The two (designated) great Bishops of Rome were Leo and Gregory. Both faced great dangers from both within and without Rom; therefore, I believe such persecution and danger engendered a greater faithfulness to the religion of Christ!

This COLLECT does not disdain punishment that we so rightly deserve, but to the pardon, redemption, and mercy made available in Christ our Lord. The ONLY thing that we truly DESERVE is justice! And if we receive the justice we deserve, we shall spend our eternities in Hell. "...*we, who are justly punished for our offences.*" In praying this Collect, we readily admit that we deserve punishment for our manifold sins. Though we have no water of our own, we may beg for it in a desert place. If given, it would be given out of mercy and not deserved in any sense. Mercy, not justice, is the thing we most need and desire. Justice becomes fulfilled in the blood of Christ once we have made appeal, through Him, for Mercy! The whole of man can be remedied by the simple mercy of God. Remember when Christ was passing along the road out of Jericho, two blind beggars hailed Him: *And as they departed from Jericho, a great multitude followed him. And, behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus passed by, cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David. And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David.* (Matt 20:29-31) They sought only mercy first, and then received their sight.

To the devout Christian, divine punishment is justly deserved by all; but it is the grace of God whereby we are reconciled to God, forgiven, restored, and redeemed of our death sentence. We need never ask of God what we deserve for, without His grace, we all would receive the just deserts for our sin and transgressions. But it is His great mercy, a corollary of grace that restores us to a position of favor with God. If we may only receive God's mercy, what more shall we need? He is All-Merciful and All-Forgiving. If we stand in His favor, even in the violent storms of life, need we fear any force of evil?

The Collect for Septuagesima Sunday is one of the few that conclude with a most glorious ending – "...*through Jesus Christ our Saviour, who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost ever, one God, world without end.*" Of course it is a forceful reminder of the Trinity of the Godhead. If we discount either Person of the Godhead, we have no Godhead upon which to call – as the three dimensions of height, depth, and width describe dimensions of a material object (and without one of which there would exist no mass) – so the Three Persons of the godhead comprise the full defining character of God.

Do we realize how perfectly GOOD is the Lord Jesus Christ? In fact, the word 'good' derives from the Middle English word for God, for God is truly GOOD. For example, 'Good Bye' derives from the Middle English term of the 1500's of *godbwyte* – or God be with you! Amazing that the atheists use this term every day without knowing, isn't it? Or that they, all around the world, acknowledge Christ's birth in their calendar year of 2013 years from his birth.

Standing, as we do, in the period between His Glorious Coming (Christmas), and His great going through His death on the Cross (Calvary), we may be best disposed to simply seek that mercy for which He came to redeem us. We are thankful for His Coming, and thankful to the promise of Redemption at the end of Lent. It is summarized in this great Collect.