

Thoughts for an *Extraordinary* Septuagesima

Name: The season “Septuagesima” is named after the first of the three Sundays of this season (which is also known as “Pre-Lent”). The names of these Sundays are: Septuagesima Sunday, Sexagesima Sunday, and Quinquagesima Sunday. These Latin names mean respectively 70th (“day” being implied), 60th (day), and 50th (day). These names continue the theme used to name the following liturgical season, *Quadragesima* (or Lent in English), which means 40th (day). The name “*Quadragesima*” will be treated in the write-up for Lent. Below are two ways of looking at the significance of the numerical values attached to the three Sundays of Septuagesima.

First, based on the numerical count associated with each of these Sundays, there are 50 days inclusively (including Sundays) between Quinquagesima Sunday and Easter Sunday, 60 days inclusively (including Sundays) between Sexagesima Sunday and Easter Wednesday, and 70 days inclusively (including Sundays) between Septuagesima Sunday and Easter Saturday. Thus the counts from Septuagesima Sunday, Sexagesima Sunday, and Quinquagesima Sunday bring us to the end of Easter Week, the middle of Easter Week, and the start of Easter Week respectively. The 40 days from Ash Wednesday (not counting the Sundays) bring us to Holy Saturday and the Easter Vigil. The little outline below gives a summary of what has just been discussed.

- Septuagesima Sunday → 70 Days (inclusive counting and counting Sundays) → Easter Saturday
- Sexagesima Sunday → 60 Days (inclusive counting and counting Sundays) → Easter Wednesday
- Quinquagesima Sunday → 50 Days (inclusive counting and counting Sundays) → Easter Sunday
- Ash Wednesday → 40 Days (inclusive counting and not counting Sundays) → Holy Saturday & Easter Vigil

Viewed in another light, the names of Septuagesima Sunday, Sexagesima Sunday, and Quinquagesima Sunday can be seen as relating to the decades of days (groups of 10 days) counted back from Easter Sunday (the first day of the first decade is Easter Sunday itself, Holy Saturday is the second day in the first decade, and so on). As Quinquagesima Sunday is the 50th day inclusively (counting Sundays) from Easter Sunday, it is part of and the conclusion of the 5th decade of days from Easter. Sexagesima Sunday falls within the 6th decade of days from Easter Sunday and is given the name of the day which closes the decade, namely the 60th (day from Easter). In the same way, Septuagesima Sunday is part of the 7th decade of days from Easter Sunday and is given the name of the day which closes the decade, namely the 70th (day from Easter).

Themes: The season of Septuagesima is set aside as a season of preparation for Lent and for the reception of ashes on Ash Wednesday. We are invited by the Liturgy to contemplate the misery of fallen humanity and the fatal consequences of original and actual sin. The Fall (original sin), the Flood (resulting from the malice of actual sin), and the Sacrifice of Melchisedech (a foreshadowing of the Sacrifice of Christ by which He worked our salvation from sin) are presented in the Matins readings over the course of the season. The Gospels and Epistles of the Sundays also touch on the themes of the Passion, salvation, and the necessity of penance. The season also serves as a transition period from the joys of Christmastide to the austerities of Lent.

The numerical value associated with the name of this season, 70, brings to mind the 70 years of exile the Hebrews endured in Babylon. This serves as a reminder that we, too, are living exiled from our heavenly home and invites us to sever our inordinate attachments to the things of this world so that we can seek after those of our true Homeland.

