

1st July 2021

Opportunity

**“Opportunity is missed by most people
because it is dressed in overalls and looks like work.”**

Thomas Eddison, as quoted in ‘An Enemy Called Average’ by John L. Mason

Marcus Valerius Martialis (known in English as Martial) was a Roman poet who originated from modern Spain. He’s best known for his twelve books of Epigrams, published in Rome between AD 86 and 103, during the reigns of the emperors Domitian, Nerva and Trajan.

An epigram is a “a pithy saying or remark expressing an idea in a clever and amusing way.” A modern exponent, therefore, would be someone like Oscar Wilde. But an epigram can also take the form of a short, satirical poem, with a witty or ingenious ending. Martial wrote 1,561 of these, often satirising life in Rome and the scandalous activities of his acquaintances. He covered all aspects of life with wit, colour and vibrancy, and often quite crudely. He wrote about the dreadful living conditions in Rome, the threat of fire and insurance scams. He poured scorn on the work of quack doctors. He condemned the cruelty slaves had to endure and berated a man for beating his cook for a minor mistake. He laughed at the trend of buying whiter, artificial teeth to improve the appearance. He ridiculed those who used dyes to cover their grey hairs.

But the epigrams I like most are his observations on how we should live, especially if life is easy for us because of wealth, position, achievement, or privilege. Here’s what he wrote in an early epigram:

*Non est, crede mihi, sapientis dicere ‘Vivam’:
Sera nimis vita est crastia: vive hodie.*

Believe me, wise men don’t say, ‘I shall live to do that’,
Tomorrow’s life is too late; live today.

Carpe diem, “Seize the day”, said Robin William’s character, John Keating, to his young pupils in the beautiful movie, *Dead Poets Society*. And why? Because he wanted them to make the most of their opportunities and to know that “tomorrow’s life” might just be too late.

So ask yourself this question: What opportunity am I putting off till tomorrow that would be better tackled now? How best can I “live today”?

A prayer for today

Lord, what opportunity do you offer me today that I shouldn’t miss? Amen.