

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Fifth Sunday after The Epiphany  
February 5, 2017

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Christians know something the world forgets or chooses to forget. A price is always being paid for everything. When you go to the zoo and see a healthy, mature, wolf you appreciate that he is a good-looking animal and a great parent. But the wolf is also a precision killing machine. If he did not kill other equally beautiful animals he would not remain beautiful looking and healthy for long, or be a good parent. There is always a price for being alive.

This isn't the law of the jungle. It is part of the fabric of all creation. Something as benign as a successful dinner party involves *sacrifice*. The chef often subordinates his own tastes and preferences for that of his guests or clientele. The foods prepared have been sacrificed: grain is cut down to make bread; meat and fat of slaughtered animals is used in our dishes and sauces. And then when this beautifully planned, prepared, and served, meal is eaten, *it disappears!* Meals make possible communion, conversation, and conviviality. But they also involve sacrifice. Sacrifice is part of the fabric of existence. Again, we live off someone else's suffering.

At the pinnacle of creation Christians identify that "someone else." We trace it to Jesus Christ. The price of redemption was the Cross. Christ's Cross is the price for being alive, and we are glad. That is why the day Christ died is called *Good Friday*. But then there is something else in the relationship with the Lord. He told us to take up *our* cross and follow Him. That means we are to permit other people *to live off of our suffering* as Jesus did.

Pliny the Elder once declared: "nothing is more useful than salt and sunshine." Salt is both an enhancer and preserver. Salt adds life to what is otherwise bland and boring, and salt saves from corruption. When Our Lord said, "Ye are the salt of the world: this is the very thing He had in mind: faithful disciples are like salt, to be used up and get added to the lives of others in ways that bring out the flavor of Christ-centered living. Christ's grace is salt in us. Grace both preserves us and brings flavor and the riches of Christ to others through us. Saint Paul makes this connection clear when writing to the Colossians. "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man."

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God's grace is the salt that seasons our conversations, makes them flavorful to others, and keeps our own talk preserved from corruption.

Many makers of stringed musical instruments will tell you the best violins or mandolins are the ones that have been played for years by a virtuoso musician. An old guitar once played by Andres Segovia is better than a brand-new one still in its case. Your highest destiny and mine is to be used by Jesus, towards ends which He alone envisions. We do not know that end, but we know that it will come about through a process of *His using us*. And He says it is like the use of salt.

It is through the grace of Christ imparted to you that preserves you and also brings the universal saving remedy of the Lord to others. Nor is this something that will happen in some far-off time when you decide you are ready. The Gospel good news is that Blessed Jesus expects you and me to be full of grace *now*. He said to His followers, "*Ye are the salt of the earth.*"