

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost
September 28, 2014

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Our Blessed Lord Jesus taught by parables. This form of instruction was a blessing for His followers. The mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven were made understandable to those who were open to the Truth and eager for it. Sometimes, however, the Lord used parables to convince His *adversaries* or make criticism of them hit close to home. This was often so successful we are told Christ's foes *reproved themselves*.

In *this* use of parables God Incarnate was doing what He had inspired the prophet Nathan to do centuries earlier. Nathan's famous parable of the ewe lamb had convinced King David he had done wrong not only in committing adultery but in trying to cover it up. As you remember, David arranged to have Bathsheba's husband killed in action.

So there is such a thing as a *reproving parable*, which appeals to the offender, and often judges him out of his own mouth. And Christ does want an answer, and says to His hearers, "But what think ye?"

Our Lord presents a parable about two types of persons. One of these proves better than he promises. The other promises better than he proves. You and I know both types. The verdict is clear. All through both Old and New Testaments *actions speak louder than words*. Constantly the Lord says through His prophets, "I hate your sacrifices when you oppress the orphan and widow." But also fully revealed throughout the Scriptures is Almighty God does not desire the death of a sinner but that he should turn from his sin and be saved.

God had inspired the great prophet Ezekiel, from whom we heard in the first lesson today. And God Incarnate in the parable we have in today's gospel validated Ezekiel, whose proclamation ran counter to the prevailing theory of group guilt. Ezekiel insisted strongly on personal responsibility. An old proverb said, "The fathers have eaten green grapes and the teeth of their children are set on edge." Ezekiel said *nonsense!* People's actions are their own, and they cannot blame the outcome on family or environment *or on God*. In reaction, Ezekiel's hearers said, "God's way is not fair." And we have been saying that ever since! The business about the green grapes is true to a point. Children do tend to accept the prevailing

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morality at home and around them. But it is a sobering fact to realize God made us free and expects us to act responsibly.

Dr. Karl Menninger once wrote a book called “Whatever Became of Sin?” A sense of shame for personal sin is a rare commodity these days. Contemporary psychotherapy even suggests there is something *wrong* with being ashamed. It is as if in The Parable of the Prodigal Son it would have been better for the wayward son to go on a TV talk show and claim to have been a victim of his environment! But God Incarnate did not so craft His parable! The prodigal son said, “Father I have sinned against heaven and before you and am no more worthy to be called thy son.” And the world recoils from such assertions and says as it did long ago to Ezekiel, “God’s way is not fair.”

In the Gospel dispensation you and I cannot fall back on the prevailing mood of the times or plead peer pressure. Acting under orders did not work for Adolf Eichmann and it doesn’t work for us. We must abuse the notion that our thievery becomes a crime only when a judge and jury say so.

Where then is the good news? It is that God *waits to be gracious*. Even when we begin in an unpromising way, yet when we repent and mend our ways Our Heavenly Father will accept us back, just as Our Lord taught in the great Parable of the Prodigal Son. So blessed be God, under Whose covenant with us there is room for repentance and a grace promised for the amendment of our ways.