

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Sixth Sunday after The Epiphany  
February 15, 2015

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Every day many people face the task of separating the urgent from the important. We call it prioritizing. In hospitals, schools, board rooms of giant corporations and mom-and-pop businesses, people wrestle with decisions on what needs to be done now at the expense of other worthy and necessary things that of necessity are deferred. Things were no different for God Incarnate Who joined us in all things except sin. For Our Lord Jesus, His three-year ministry was no picnic in the park.

God's Own Son was aware that being about the Father's business meant preaching and teaching and ultimately having it all lead to the Cross. The problem along the way was that the Lord, *and now everybody else too*, was aware He had been given God's Own power to heal. The Lord's popularity as a healer was in danger of spoiling His entire plan for a preaching tour of towns and synagogues. Jesus knew crowds would come looking specifically for miracles instead of instruction.

So having gone out early to pray in communion with His Father, Jesus reaffirmed His preaching mission. He declared, "That is why I came out." But very soon a leper came to the Lord seeking healing. And Jesus "who knew what was in man and needed no one to tell Him", knew what this man would do when he was healed. Instead of going as directed, and quietly, to the priest to perform the proper Levitical rites, this man was going to act like a jumping jack in joy for healing. The cleansed leper would announce to one and all that *Jesus did it!* With people's minds so full of miracles there would be no room in them for hearing God's Own Son reveal the glories of the Kingdom of Heaven.

So it was *decision time*. What was the Incarnate God going to do? The answer is that *the compassionate God took over*. He set aside His Own better plans for our sake. He gave up the divinely and salvific important work for the urgent task at hand. And this is something God had been doing all along. A thousand years earlier He had accepted the pleas of Moses for the "stiff-necked and rebellious" Hebrews in the wilderness. Later, in Israel, when the people pestered the Judges for a king, Samuel consulted the Lord and then gave the people Saul for their king. Fast-forward a few years and one fine day King David decided God needed a temple to live in, when no such thought was on the Divine mind. The Lord allowed Solomon to build that temple. In all these cases the end result was worse than the

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beginning! But in all these cases, as in today's Gospel, Almighty God relented, changed His plans, because of His care for the people. *Like Father, like Son!*

Jesus was willing, (and so must be His followers) if and when necessary, to give up the important for the urgent. Jesus had His priorities. It was a *Divine* mission. Yet the Lord's Sacred Heart could always be moved. Things are no different today. The Church sees herself as the sacrament of the unity of all people. That is why she is in the forefront of advocacy for human rights and relief of suffering worldwide, regardless of race or creed. The Church has her priorities and her teaching obligations because they are her mandate from the Lord. But her heart can always be moved. How can it be otherwise?

When the leper pleaded, "If you will, you can make me clean," compassion took over. Jesus said, "I will; be clean." Jesus set aside His Own agenda. His decision to heal affected the outcome of the whole preaching tour. Scripture tells us as a result the Lord had to remain in the countryside. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people would never hear the Son of God preach about the Kingdom of Heaven in their towns. People today would still rather be relieved of discomfort than be taught to place their lives under the authority of God's sovereign law. Both of these things are regrettable. But we are still privileged to have this incident in the scriptures and see the Lord wrestle with the problem of what to do. And we are glad the Son of God came down on the side of compassion. We are glad when His Church does so too, even at the momentary cost of some other things.

Unlike the healed leper, of course, we are to *follow* Jesus' commands after we have received His mercy. And we are to follow His example, resorting to prayer often, in order to seek the Father's will in all things.