

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
Sermon preached by Father Bradford at Stations of the Cross
In Saint Theresa of Avila Church
March 20, 2015

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Several weeks ago Holy Church gave us as a Sunday Mass Gospel an account of the Transfiguration of the Lord. On Mount Tabor Christ had revealed His glory to His closest disciples. They saw His splendor, His body clothed in garments which had the appearance of burning snow. Light was not shining upon Jesus but came from *within* Him. The disciples were terrified by the sight of the Divine glory.

On Good Friday it is not Mount Tabor. It is Golgotha, *the place of a skull*. And soon after His arrival there, Jesus was stripped of His garments. That word “stripped” means the Lord’s clothing was torn from Him as quickly as possible. This crucifixion was a rush job! The condemned men had to be dead before sundown and removed from the crosses. Sundown marked the beginning of Passover when no body could remain on a cross.

Christ’s garments must have been stiff with the blood, and welts, mud, and sweat caused by scourging and His falling under the weight of the rough cross beams. Sweat filled clothing sticks to a body. And being torn from Jesus it must have been like tearing His flesh.

And then there for all to see was the beautiful body of our Redeemer. Beautiful because *The Sinless One*. This was not to show us His perfection, the most beautiful of the Sons of God. Christ stripped of His garments is another of His precious gifts to us. It gave us another revelation of His Divine love. Christ is for sinners who are *found out*. His will is to be Lord of men and women in their most bitter humiliations, and for those whose shame is made public and those whose bad conduct is shown to those whom they love. Christ would be Savior of the repentant murderer who must pay the price of his sin before the world. Jesus would be Lord of the child whose disgrace is made known to his mother whom he wanted to make proud of him. Of the man who wanted his friend’s respect, but it turned out wrong. I think of an archdiocesan priest, recently deceased, who when falsely accused of child abuse and forced out of his rectory spent months sleeping in his car until he was exonerated. You will have other examples, perhaps some close and personal. And then, the Stations of the Cross move on! Jesus is nailed to the Cross.

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But let's stop for a moment and wonder what became of Christ's garments. We would build vast cathedrals to house even *a single thread* of Christ's robe soaked as it was with His Precious Blood. It was cloth that had been worn to the shape of His Body and life and labors. Think of what we would do if we had even *a wood shaving* from Saint Joseph's carpenter shop at Nazareth! What would it mean to have a table or chair made by the Son of God? We would gladly exchange the wealth of the world for that table!

Saint John's Gospel gives us a little aside about what happened to Christ's garments. "When the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took his garments and made four parts, one for each soldier; also his tunic. But the tunic was without seam, woven from top to bottom; so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be. So the soldiers did this." (John 19:23-24) But be careful when you read that little aside! Saint John always means more than he says.

If Christ's garments had survived, pilgrims from all over the world would kneel before them and venerate the reliquary containing them. But when Jesus was stripped of His garments you and I were meant to put on *Him* like a garment, to put on the shape and purity of His body and the shape of His labor and human nature and His delight in the good things His Father had created. We are meant to have more than relics of Christ. *We are meant to have Christ Himself.*

One soldier won the lottery! He took Christ's seamless garment. And he certainly did not destroy it. He would have worn the garment himself. We don't know this man's name or his story. He had been unlucky to draw execution-squad duty that Friday. But this young soldier who without fault of his own helped crucify Christ then was *the first to put on Christ*. He tried to fit his own body to the shape of Christ. And in that way he is our forerunner, yours and mine, who must put on Christ, we who strive to grow to the shape of His work, purity, humanity, and majesty and most of all *the pattern of His love*, Who, stripped naked on Golgotha, accepted even our shame *as if it were His Own*.