

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Palm Sunday  
March 29, 2015

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Many saints have thought Our Lord was praying the Psalms the whole time He hung upon the Cross. The Psalter was the Old Testament's hymnal. You and I may have a copy of *The Hymnal 1940*, but copies of anything were scarce and expensive until well into modern times. The ancient Jews knew the Psalms by heart. Scripture quotes our Lord Jesus saying the first words of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Psalm. "My God, why hast thou forsaken me?" And towards the end of His ordeal, the Bible records that the Blessed Lord came to the fifth verse of Psalm 31 and cried, "Into thy hands I commit my spirit." Then Jesus gave up His human spirit into His father's hands.

Reciting the Psalms from memory was not the 1<sup>st</sup> Century equivalent of singing "ninety-nine bottles of beer on the wall!" Golgotha was not a "makes the day go faster" situation! Fully divine, Jesus is also fully human. Here was a human person in desperation drawing upon all the spiritual resources He had known since childhood. The physical horror of crucifixion is beyond comprehension. The Lord was victim of an incredible combination of blows, whips, thorns, hard labor, nails, and a spear. Reading the accounts of the Passion we get the definite impression Our Lord was being destroyed like some kind of venomous snake, beaten upon relentlessly because of a fear it contained some incomprehensible energy or force! But it also becomes clear from the Scriptures the greatest suffering was caused by the *isolation* Our Lord felt, both in Gethsemane and on the Cross.

We cannot know this for sure. But it seems that, hanging on the Cross, betrayed by one and all, Our Lord Jesus also lost the life-long connection He had with His Own Divine origin and destiny. And it was precisely by this forgetting that He became completely one with us. For we can forget our origin and destiny. We can come to the place where all we can say is, "If God exists He doesn't care."

Outsiders ask what kind of religion is it where the Son of God is forsaken by God? The answer is Christianity is the religion of good news. This forsakenness is a revelation of Almighty God's *relentless love*. Here is the Son upon Whom the Father looked and found nothing but perfection. And the Son would experience everything we do yet did not sin. Easter morning will have the final word about that. But we aren't at Easter morning. We are at what is known as *The Fourth*

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*Word from the Cross.* “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Christ Jesus went to the lowest depths to which man ever comes and there He laid Himself as a foundation by which we *may* pass over. Think of a concrete highway laid across the bottom of a swamp. However great the depth of sorrow or shame or degradation to which you or I may sink, it is not the bottom. Christ went lower still. He did that because He had you and me in mind that we might at last pass over to life through Him.

All our formal prayers reflect what happened on Good Friday. Whatever we pray in petition, praise, or thanksgiving, is done “*though Jesus Christ our Lord.*” That phrase is not a warning signal to prepare to say “Amen!” On the night before Calvary Jesus had said, “Hitherto have ye asked nothing *in My Name*. Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father *in My Name*, He will give it you.” Ever since Good Friday every prayer we make is prayed through the Passion of Christ. “*Through Christ our Lord*” is not some kind of totem! “Through Christ our Lord” means, “through Who Christ is and what He does for us.” The Lord’s Prayer does not end this way, of course, and there is a reason. The Our Father was given us *before* Good Friday.

We have an absolute claim on the Heart of Almighty God. It is that we plead the sacrifice of His dear Son. *Jesus’ death is our way to the Father.* He has made it so. It is the way we pass over from sin and death to life, now and at the hour of our death.