

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
July 5, 2015

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The incident of Christ's sermon at hometown Nazareth disappoints us. We do not possess a copy of the sermon, although St Luke says it was based on Isaiah chapter 61. The sermon laid out the Lord's conception of the Messiah. Which, of course, would be the *right* conception! Whatever Jesus said about the Messiah, the sermon fell like a lead balloon. When we remember the hometown hero's welcome given such people as Charles Lindbergh, General Patton, and Neil Armstrong what a contrast with Our Blessed Lord! When the Creator of Heaven and earth fully incarnate in the Word-made-flesh goes home to Nazareth He is rejected. It is all a warning about fallen human nature and the difficulty of claiming Christ as Lord in an obstinate and unbelieving world.

By the time the Lord returned to Nazareth He was a national personality. The folks at Nazareth were already enjoying a bit of fame as the hometown of the Lord's then more-famous cousin John the Baptist. Everyone went to the synagogue to hear Jesus that Sabbath Day. Scripture says the people who heard Jesus preach were *astonished* at His teaching. "Astonishment" can mean many things, good and bad. In this case it is clear the Lord's teaching was not evaluated on its own merits. *They discounted Him Who said it.* "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?" Never mind being a carpenter does not automatically disqualify someone from speaking the truth! Never mind being the son of Mary should have been the greatest of *compliments*! Everyone in Nazareth knew Blessed Mary to be the outstanding holy woman she was. More to the point, notice that while in Nazareth Jesus was rejected because they knew His origins, in Judaea they rejected Him saying "we know not from whence He is." (John 9:29) Obstinate unbelief will always find an excuse! The real point is that in this crowd there was no heart truly responsive to the truth of the Gospel. Our Lord found that situation in many places, and so does His Church.

Jesus warned His closest followers if the world hated and rejected Him it would reject them also. But Our Saviour was also very clear neither victories nor setbacks in any way affected the rightness of the cause for which we stand. Victories and defeats have a way of affecting *our* enthusiasm for staying the course. But they have no effect on the rightness of the Gospel faith we proclaim.

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The Lord told us any right cause in this world almost always means temporary loss and sometimes even permanent worldly loss. An old-time priest with World War 2 experience used to say, “If you’re catching flak you must be over the target!” At the heart of our story is the conviction of the Son of God Who on Good Friday did not think He was wasting His time. You and I are among those countless people who have followed Christ in that thinking. He was not wasting His time.

We are not afraid to follow the Nazareth homecoming to its sad ending. When the Sabbath was over at sundown people came together as they always did in little end-of-the-weekend socials. This was 1st Century Palestine’s version of gathering “after church.” The morning’s service and preacher had disturbed them. They all knew Jesus was a notable hometown person. But they were pleased and relieved at having rejected Him and His highly suspicious teaching.

These people were given an unprecedented opportunity. They could have drawn closer to Almighty God in a way no one ever dreamed possible. But they had missed the chance. No one was saved that day. And it is a warning to us, not only about our own victories and setbacks on the road of Christian discipleship. It is even more an alert to the care we need to take, in the ordering of our own lives, not to be left behind and miss the Lord. And right here is one of the saddest verses in the whole Bible. It is said of the Lord Jesus at Nazareth, “He did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief.”