

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Thirteenth Sunday after Pentecost
August 23, 2015

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Beware of small post offices! It is where you encounter women who have just got religion and want to tell you all about it. It happens to me in West Roxbury where some very nice ladies greet me and then ask if I believe the Bible is the Word of God. And when I say, “No, *Jesus* is the Word of God and the Bible says so” that sets them off as I wave and smile and head for my car. Many years ago in Richland, Michigan, just outside Kalamazoo, the post office custodian was a woman who once greeted me with the news she had just got religion. I replied if that meant accepting Jesus Christ as her Lord and Saviour it was *great* news. But when I went back to licking stamps for my parish mailing *she went on*. “Isn’t it wonderful we are saved by faith not works, lest any man should boast.” I stopped licking stamps for a moment and thought how easy it would be just to agree with her and get back to my letters! But this new Christian had to know there would be times when her faith would not shine so bright and works would go a long way towards saving her. In reaction, when she pushed back, I stopped with my mailing and said, “Listen, sister, now that you are following Jesus you need to know what He said to do.” He said you have to be baptized and you have to receive communion if you want to be part of Him and have His life in you.” Although I saw her often after that I do not remember any other conversation about religion. Her pastor probably told her to stay away from Father Bradford.

I think of that incident when I read today’s Gospel, a part of Our Lord great sermon on the Blessed Sacrament. In it the Lord says we have to *eat* Him. Never mind some Bible scholars also push back and tell us the word “eat” may mean “read” or absorb” or “memorize.” It *can* mean those things, *but not here!* Jesus deliberately used the word “flesh” rather than “body” in His instruction. When He did use the words “body and blood” He wanted us to know that the Life which feeds us is no intellectual or cerebral transaction. Holy Communion is the fruit of the physical death of Jesus of Nazareth on the Cross.

The Son of God lost some of His followers with this teaching. They may have been the first people to distort the gospel with what we may call the “*nice*” filter. It is nice when someone gets religion. It is nice when someone loves God. Generally we think love is nice. Well in point of fact the gospel isn’t nice, and Jesus wasn’t

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nice, and love isn't nice either. Love is sometimes a pain, a great cost, spiritually and physically. It is taking care of a loved one who is ill, spending your life and money doing it. The gospel isn't nice. Jesus said it brings a *sword*. Some of you feel that estrangement in relations with family and friends because of your adherence to Catholic teaching. God doesn't love creation because it is a nice thing to do! He loves creation because He apparently has no other choice! God is love: *everything He does is love*. Even His wrath is love. His judgement is love.

Every time you receive the Blessed Sacrament it is not because Jesus is nice. You are doing it because Jesus died for you and told you to eat Him. And you don't obey Him because *you* are nice! You need saving. And by receiving the Blessed Sacrament you acknowledge Jesus Himself is the saving remedy for your soul and body.

None of us thinks a lion is being nice when he stalks, hunts down, kills, and eats a cute and graceful antelope. *But it is in his best interest to do so*. Prayer and meditation, doing good works in response to the faith that is in us, following Christ's example and teachings, remembering Him.....all these are good. They are part of what we call "food for the soul." But at the heart of Christian discipline there is a literal truth. Spiritual growth is not motivated by idealism or notions of being nice, but by *hunger*. *And Jesus Himself is the food*.