

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost  
October 11, 2015

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The four gospels give us the methods Our Lord Jesus used to win souls. Those methods are customized to the condition of each soul. We all hear the one Gospel proclaimed. Each of us is nourished by the same sacraments. We hear the same sermons. But the Lord is *the great physician of souls* Who knows perfectly what graces need to be applied in each case. When a parishioner at the door after Mass says my sermon hit him right between the eyes, my answer is, “Don’t blame me; blame the Holy Spirit!”

When the rich man (St Mark implies that he is not a *young* man) comes to Jesus for direction, the Lord tells him to “follow the commandments.” That is a stock answer to a stock question. *All* of us must follow the commandments! When the man answers, “Yes, I have done that” Jesus then *individualizes the prescription*. He invites the rich man to divest himself of his possessions and join the band of disciples. Once general spiritual applications become applied to us as individuals they invariably hit us where we hurt. Our Lord saw where this man needed to grow and that this was in an area where he was most attached, (perhaps a bit dishonest and defensive about it too.) That area did indeed hurt! We are told, “He went away sorrowful.”

It is a remarkable thing that in the space of four verses Our Lord is recorded as apparently offering *two different approaches* to salvation. In verse five He declared “Whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” Four verses later Jesus says, “You know the commandments” (implying that following the commandments is the way to inherit eternal life.) So which is it? Is salvation a free gift (as to a child) or is it something we earn by good conduct, (following commandments?) In *Richard II* Shakespeare has the king bewail that “Thoughts of things divine are intermixed, and do set the Word Itself against the Word.”

After the rich man’s departure, the apostles question Jesus about it. And the Lord reflects on the problem saying that those who have left houses and families for the sake of the gospel will receive an hundredfold. But Peter and the others had not given up either houses or families. The rich man was told to give up his possessions. But the Lord did not require this of *other* perspective disciples who

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had wealth. Rather, here is an indication that the Lord Jesus diagnoses the problem in each soul and zeros in on the solution to whatever roadblock is in the path of Christian discipleship.

There are obstacles which hinder each of us from making a wholehearted response to Christ. Chances are that for you and me, just as for the rich would-be disciple, these are places of attachment where some defensiveness and a lack of clear sight can lead to dishonesty in the matter. There may be shyness, or fear of what people may say. We may dislike strictness and authority over us. We may be afraid of our own lack of resolve. We may despair of our high calling. If we really understood the power of the grip of such attachments on our souls we would understand our absolute helplessness in the spiritual struggle. Our Lord said, “With man it is not possible but with God.”

Jesus said to the rich man not only, “Sell what you have” but, “Come, follow Me.” Caught up in his attachment to wealth, and in a hurry to get away from Jesus, the man *did not hear the good news*. “Come, follow Me” means, “I will be with you; I will guide you, and I will make it all possible to do what on our own you could never do.”

This is a lesson we all must learn. When Moses was taken aback by his own high calling, God said, “I have made thee *a god* to Pharaoh.” (*Exodus 7:1*) A thousand years later Almighty God was still teaching the same lesson to four fishermen after their unsuccessful night on the lake. What Jesus asked was contrary to everything they knew about fishing. Peter must have shook his head wearily while saying, “Nevertheless, at Thy word, I will let down the net.” And the rest, as they say, is history! Our Blessed Lord Jesus is more than able to make you and me strong enough and wise enough to succeed in our venture for His glory. That is the Gospel, and it’s good news!