

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on All Souls' Day  
November 2, 2015

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Some of you may be familiar with the words, "In the midst of life we are in death." Their origin is attributed to a ninth century monk named Notker, of the Abbey of St. Gall in Switzerland. In medieval England these words were one of the antiphons sung with the *Nunc dimittis*, the canticle at Compline. "In the midst of life we are in death." They are words not of comfort but of *preparation*, preparing us for, and reminding us of, the way things are in a universe inhabited, but not created, by you and me.

Death was not an original part of God's plan for us. The Holy Scriptures affirm Almighty God is God of the living, and is interested in the death of no one. But sin entered our life and, "The wages of sin is death." For us in the fallen but redeemed human condition, the only way to escape physical death is to never have been born. But Almighty God provided us with a way out, and His constant exhortation is, "Turn from your sin and live."

God could have planned creation differently had He so desired. He could have planned a world without mosquitoes. Saturdays could be for picnics and free of rain. But Almighty God could *not* have planned a world without human free will. Why? Because God is Love, and we are made in His image, and *love chooses*. And because God is holy, death is the end of sinful earthly life. It has to be that way because holiness destroys sin, *every time*. For human beings then, made in the image and likeness of Almighty God, there is no alternative.

Gospel means *good news*. So where is the good news? It is that in the Cross of Christ God defeated the ultimate horror and power of death. In Christ God has done what is decisive for us. He has used death itself to defeat death, and at the same time draw closer to Himself all who call upon His beloved Son. "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me." But remember, His Incarnate Life came to risen life through the grave. It is the way we must go to God.

The epistle on All Saints' Day says we are God's children *now*. And that when all "is fulfilled, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." (1 John 3) Because God is all-holy, we cannot see Him if we are not like Him. That is true whether we live in this life or the next. To see Jesus face to face is to be like Jesus.

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There can be no reservations, no holding back, no part of us where He does not reign completely. The end result is the promise of today's gospel. Jesus says, "Everything the Father has given Me will come to Me."

So it is right that we remember in prayer and at Mass our beloved who have departed this life, who are dead indeed to the sufferings and sorrows and the whole sinful condition which permeates and pervades this life. All of that means they are alive unto God in Jesus Christ our Lord. May they rest in peace!