

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Good Friday
March 25, 2016

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How often a penitent has confessed to anger and the urge to get even with some relative, friend, or fellow worker. And how often in counsel I ask, “Do you have a crucifix at home?” “Yes, Father.” “Do you look at it?” There is a pause. Most Catholics have a crucifix, sometimes hanging by the front door. And they pass it by in favor of the nearby mirror for straightening a hat or tie before going out the door. A crucifix can be regarded as a beautiful piece of furniture, a wall hanging worked in wood, precious stones, silver and gold leaf. We can admire the craftsmanship of the corpus attached to the cross.

Today however, we have *veiled* crosses in churches, or else the crosses have been removed where possible. That is so we will make the effort to place ourselves before the Tree of Beauty which was raised up on Mount Calvary. On Good Friday that is where we wish to be, and the ancient Liturgy appointed for this day is our vehicle of transport.

The Crucifix on the Hill is not like the one you have by your front hall mirror. This Cross is made of rough and unfinished wood. To it is fastened the body of a living Man. Great spikes have pierced the Man’s hands and feet fastening Him to the wood like a butterfly in an insect display box. His body is bruised and gashed raw from brutal beating. His face is white. The pain and the enormous strain on His spread arms have drained the blood from His head. Jesus on the Cross is not a beautiful work of art. But *valuable*? All the world’s wealth from the beginning of time until now cannot hold a candle to the value of the original Good Friday Crucifix.

It is the Man hanging on the Cross Who makes all the difference. Who is He? He is God’s Own Son become Man. And He is *perfect*. He is the perfect definition for which we have the word **perfect**. He is perfect in *holiness* and *love*. And He is the perfect definition of those words also: **holiness** and **love**. How did He get here? It was out of love for the entire human race: not just for all of us, but for *each* of us. And the great thing is that although we have rebelled against Him, He yet calls us friends.

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On Good Friday we stand before the true Cross. The Body hanging there looks down at us and asks, “This have I done for thee; what doest thou for Me?” Your crucifix at home does that too, which is why I ask penitents to look at it before quickly passing out the door. How we answer the Lord’s question shows how we have responded to the lesson of the Cross. It is a daily reminder the service of God is costly. It involves a death to sin. And it tells us that in a sinful world those who serve the Lord will attract the world’s scorn and hate. The mockery, unpopularity, ostracism, and physical harm seen on Good Friday may be laid upon faithful Christian shoulders and hearts at any time. “Because the world hated Me, it will hate you also.”

Good Friday does not seek a stirred-up, synthetic, emotion in us one day a year. The Man on the Cross asks that we place our whole lives in His hands. There can be no territory where the King’s writ does not run. We think no one has the right to ask us to do what hurts us, or to give up what we wish to keep. We build clever cases for excluding God from certain areas of our lives. But it won’t wash! You know that. It is why you are here. Even before Good Friday, excuses never worked. The fact is our Creator has *absolute rights* over us.

But Good Friday *does* make a difference. This Living Man fastened to a cross is not the sight of ordinary justice. He deals with us on the basis of love and mercy. Yes He does demand sacrifice. Ours won’t match His of course. He does not expect that it would. But His gifts also will be all out of proportion to the sacrifices we make in turning to Him. The prodigal son returned to his father in rags and wanted only the status of a hired servant. But the father recognized his son a far way off, and called for the best robe and jewelry.

You may not kneel very often before a Crucifix. But you will do it today. And let your homage to Our Lord Jesus be a reminder that His demands are made in love. His hands and face show that love, bearing the marks of nails and crown of thorns. They point the way and walk the path He has lovingly shown us. *And you have decided to go with this Man.*