

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Seventh Sunday of Easter  
May 8, 2016

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There are *two* Lord's Prayers recorded in the New Testament. The first is the prayer Our Lord taught His disciples to pray. We call it the "Our Father." The *second* is the prayer Jesus Himself prayed, but allowed to be heard. He prayed it on Holy Thursday when He and His disciples passed through Jerusalem after the Last Supper and on their way to Gethsemane. Some of the saints tell us the Lord's Own prayer of self-dedication is the most sacred passage in the Gospels. It's a long prayer, but a portion of the end of it is our Gospel today at Mass.

In this prayer Jesus says, "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am." In His ministry, the Lord Jesus sets us the example of being less concerned with asserting our wishes for ourselves in our prayers. But we *are* to be definite, determined, and deliberate, when we ask for good things for others. A few hours after He prayed this prayer the Blessed Lord gave the supreme example of His instruction. In Gethsemane He prayed "Not My will but Thine be done."

On the way to Gethsemane the Lord's thoughts and heart were focused on His disciples. Jesus never hesitated to pray for Christians (not just for the original twelve apostles, but for *all* "who believe in Me through their word.") He prayed, "Father, I desire that they also may be with Me where I am." And down through history the Church has followed the great example of her Master. Much Catholic spiritual guidance has insisted upon detachment from our own personal plans and interests as an essential ingredient in our growing ability to help others.

There is much in each of us that resists helping others! Taking care of "number one" is a strong motive. But Our Heavenly Father sees Christians *together* as in His Son. He sees the oneness of humanity even as each individual soul is precious in His sight. But one of the tragic aspects of our fallen human nature (which is that we do not see as God sees) is our focus on separateness and alienation. It is our differences from each other that leap to our attention. And our concentration on differences breeds all the nasty characteristics in us most of us would deny or disown if we could.

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In His prayer of self-dedication Jesus prays to the Father that we be one. This is not unity for its own sake. It is His prayer to the Father “that they may be one *as We are One*.” The power to be converted and to convert others is not because of our unity as such. It is as a consequence of *our union with Christ* that we have the Divine Life flowing in us. Jesus said, “I am the Vine; ye are the branches; without Me ye can do nothing.”

Never underestimate the devotional life! You and I were superbly designed to *have* a devotional life. It is vast in importance; its quality is crucial both for its potential to comfort and strength *us*, and to promote the ability of Christ Who chooses to reach others *through* us. That is why Jesus allowed His great intercessory prayer, (His *other* “Lord’s Prayer”) to be heard by the apostles. We are to learn the sacred science of Christ’s Own relationship with the Father and make it our own. Jesus tells us as much. He says, “These things I speak in the world that they might have My joy fulfilled in themselves.” It is Christ’s joy in us which draws others and us to Him.

In Ascension-tide we have a novena of nine days in the run up to the great Feast of Pentecost, when the Church was filled with power from on high. We must revive devotion to God the Holy Spirit Who is the very Agent of Love in the Holy Trinity Itself, the only One Whose power will unite each of us more closely to God and to each other in the life of the Beloved Son.