

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Fifth Sunday after Pentecost  
June 19, 2016

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In Chapters 6-9 of St Luke's gospel we get to read about the developing ministry of Our Lord and His disciples. This development culminated when Jesus sent the Twelve out on their first solo missionary journey. Think of it as their maiden voyage or trial run. At the moment of their return a pastoral emergency occurred: hungry people to feed. But after the feeding of the 5000, The Lord was finally able to ask His disciples about their missionary experiences. This is what we now call a *debriefing*. Jesus was especially interested in the reaction the disciples received.

What did people think about Jesus? He put the question this way. "Who do they say that I am?" When various answers were given the Lord pressed His disciples. "Who do you say that I am?" This might mean "what are you saying about Me that leads to such a variety of answers?" But St Peter didn't take the question that way. He took it personally. Peter was answering for his colleagues when he said, "Thou art the Christ of God."

Jesus accepted Peter's verdict. But if the true nature of Christ was generally accepted the Lord would have been made king by acclamation, expected to raise an army and fight a war for independence from Rome. There would have been no Cross, and no salvation. Revolutionary leaders come and go and after they go things settle down until the next revolutionary leader comes along. Nothing of that sort would redeem mankind from sin and death. So the great secret had to be kept secret *for now*.

This was the *first* secret, and knowing it was a step in the development of the ministry of Christ's disciples. *They had to know Who Jesus is*. But the first secret led to the second. Now they knew Jesus was the Messiah they needed to know that "God's ways are not man's ways." Christ's coming would lead to shame and death on a Cross. Glory and redemption would be revealed and accomplished through the perfect sacrifice of the Perfect Man. The Christian mission was, as Jesus said, the hard way. Every follower of Christ must be prepared to take the hard way.

When a girl deliberately rejects marriage in order to take care of an invalid parent she is judged as missing the great opportunity of her life. When a man rejects divorce and continues to live with his wife who makes his life miserable he is

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thought a fool. The world tells us sacrifice is a waste of a good life. Christ not only told us about another way, He *showed us* in His perfect life. And He said, “Follow Me.”

Being a follower of Christ does not simply involve being ridiculed or hated. Being loyal to Christ makes a disciple conscious of his own sin and the sin and suffering of the world. Christians do not wish to be isolated or insulated from that world but by grace being a soldier of Christ *in it*. Sharing the great weight of Christ on the Cross is not just the price but also the privilege of union with the One we say we love and worship and adore.

We all have a short list for what might be considered the saddest words in the Bible. How about when Jesus said to His brothers, “The world cannot hate you.”? That was because they, like most of us, were not good enough to be hated. Hatred is attracted to goodness like metal filings to a magnet. That’s just the way it is. It is why Christ in His Passion was so terribly mistreated more than any man, as Isaiah had foretold. Christ’s goodness was not the highest on the scale of an applause meter! Christ is the *source of goodness*. And it follows that He endured hatred at its source. The consummate battle between good and evil was fought from Gethsemane to Golgotha.

Years later the Twelve disciples faced all kinds of tribulation, and most were martyred. They must have often remembered the peaceful evening in the Galilean hills when their Master revealed the *second* secret and said for the first time, “The Son of Man must suffer many things.” As followers of Jesus the disciples were beginning to learn the meaning of hatred and suffering. The followers of Jesus are still doing that.

Jesus once said, “Blessed are ye when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company and reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of Man’s sake.” The test of loyalty is still the same. It is not success or achievement, or the praise our work may evoke in others, that makes us blessed. It is our readiness to suffer because we have rejected the devil (and sometimes even good things) in order to follow the Lord.