

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost
June 26, 2016

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After the Transfiguration we are told of Our Lord “He set His face to go to Jerusalem” where He would be “received up.” “Received up” makes us think of the Cross. The most famous saying about the Cross and its effect is found in St John’s Chapter 12: “And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me.” But St Luke also uses the word “received up” to describe the Ascension. So the connection is being made here, as it also is in the Fourth Gospel, that the path to glory leads through the Cross. *No Cross, no crown.*

Having realized and accepted this vocation, Jesus “set His face” to it. And people could sense the difference. There was something new and determined about the Lord’s *countenance*. Even the Samaritan villagers picked up on this. They knew nothing about the Transfiguration and little about Christ, but St Luke says they made no attempt to welcome Jesus because they saw *He was determined to press on.*

So that sets up the image opening today’s gospel passage. The Lord is on His way, and on His way He was accompanied by a large crowd of followers and some hangers-on. Some were no doubt formally invited by Jesus to join His little band, and others offered to sign up on their own initiative. In today’s gospel three of these men are mentioned.

One man had little idea of what Christian discipleship meant. Another was not available at the moment but he could join up tomorrow or the next day. The last offered to come on his own conditions. We are reminded in this Gospel incident that each of us is already dealing with an assortment of priorities and values when we get nudged by the Holy Spirit in the direction of the Lord Jesus Christ. As we go through life we are always in the process of sorting out our obligations and fine-tuning our goals. Into that motion (and often it is *commotion!*) comes the claim of Jesus Christ for total obedience.

All along our way our revisions are based upon our situation at that moment. We saw that on Friday. Reaction to Britain’s forthcoming exit from the European Union triggered automatic sell orders in the world’s stock markets. Over this weekend there is a great amount of money in sugar bowls and stuffed in

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mattresses. (Money managers don't use those terms of course. They have euphemisms.) But with all that, most people going through life are consciously or unconsciously seeking that *one central value* that will never change when everything else is unstable or in perpetual flux. Here then is the big question: Is there one value ever constant, no matter how we look at life, or how our way of thinking may change? And Christ Jesus says, "I am that central value and priority. No matter how your life changes, the more you follow Me the more precious you will find Me to be."

Our First Lesson at Mass describes the memorable incident when Elisha was called by Elijah to be his assistant. Elisha not only left off plowing in the field; He slew the oxen and roasted the meat on the wood of the yoke as a sacrifice to the Lord. The scriptural image is far more powerful than the secular adage "burning your bridges behind you"! Was the Lord thinking of Elisha when He made His remark to the vacillating and hesitant would-be disciple? We know our Lord's thoughts on decision making. Jesus rejoiced to see the poor widow cast into the temple treasury all her living. No hesitation there! Nor in Elisha! So this is the only acceptable attitude in anyone who wishes to enter the Kingdom of God. God may be moving very fast by your life.

Saint Luke does not tell us what happened to the three men. But it looks like they were left behind. The disciples who made it all the way to Jerusalem with Jesus faltered at the horror of the crucifixion. But they also eventually became the nucleus of the Catholic Church against which the gates of hell would not prevail. The Lord was seeking lion-hearted, not poor-spirited, followers for the path to glory. In the Beatitudes, "poor in spirit" means hungry in spirit *and knowing it*. So the three hopefuls were left breathless by the roadside while the Jesus cavalcade swept on towards Jerusalem. God may be moving very fast by your life.

When it comes time to go with the Lord only fools dawdle! You do not have to be a theologian or deep-thinker. To their eternal credit the shepherds at Bethlehem went *with haste* "to see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made know unto us." Those who have even an inkling of the unparalleled worth of the moment make prompt sacrifices and follow Christ. In Him we have the central

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value against which everything else will be measured, dropped, revised, or immeasurably enriched. We are never to hold back in our relationship to Christ. It is the only exchange in all creation from which we will always come out the winner.