

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
August 7, 2016

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From the point of view of modern arrogance it is tempting to discount any instructions using archaic language. Unless you live in someplace like India, we do not “gird our loins”, and if we want light we flip a switch. So the instructions given by the Lord Jesus seem more quaint than compelling. “Roll up your sleeves” might be acceptable, but “always keep extra light bulbs on hand” somehow lacks the force of the Lord’s instructions!

But we cannot and must not dismiss the *teaching*. God in Christ is telling His followers in every age to live in expectation and readiness for His coming again. We are to look forward to that coming and eagerly await it. We are to prepare for it, and, if possible, hasten it. If we follow the Lord’s instructions, and those of His great saints, we will live as though each moment were the last before the judgment day Jesus says will come. It is not profitable to quibble about old-fashioned language. But it *is* important to ask: “what am I doing right now and how would it be different if I knew it was to be the very last act of my life?” Assisting at Mass would not be different, of course, but what about our actions an hour ago or an hour from now?

This business about “loins girded” and “lamps burning” means as Christ’s servants we are to be *working* servants, not idle ones. We are to have our lives “tucked up”, as it were, so as not to hinder activity on His behalf. We are to have our soul’s lamps fueled with the oil of the Holy Ghost, which is grace, burning with the love of God and man, and zeal for the work of Christ’s Kingdom. There is no one way to do this, although there certainly are *wrong* ways! But your opportunities may differ from mine and from one another’s even as we share many that are the same. In each case Christians will have as their identifying characteristic that they are *working* servants, and they are *waiting* servants: working in the Master’s house and doing Him the honor of waiting upon Him.

To achieve that end we must, if necessary, sell everything we have. Give up the things to which you are attached in this life. This isn’t a *moral* demand. If it were, *all* the followers of Christ in every age would have to live in extreme poverty. We know that many disciples from the very beginning had great possessions. Rather, what Jesus says is a practical spiritual teaching. It is not that if you own a fancy

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imported four-slice toaster with interior lights you cannot inherit the kingdom of Heaven! But we are to abandon any and every thing preventing us from working and waiting for Christ. As you know, it is not money but the *love* of money that is the root of all evil.

The world is full of traps to lure us into a false security and away from the Lord. The great saints have long lists of these very types of things that snared them. You and I can identify the booby traps and make lists of what punches our buttons and can trap us, save for the grace and mercy of the Lord. I tell the story of a man who worked hard, made money, and rewarded himself with the purchase of a beautiful luxury automobile. He thought this would give him security and a sense of well-being. But security and well-being *come from the Lord and Him only*. Two things happened to the man with the new car. His insurance premium doubled! And a few days after his purchase he discovered a long, deep, scrape the whole length of one side of his car, right down to the metal. It was the kind of scrape caused accidentally by a boy on a bike, or somebody carelessly pushing a shopping cart. Does the owner of the car report the damage to his insurance agent and risk an even higher premium? Or does he himself pay for the bodywork and paint job? Or, doing nothing, does he let his beautiful new car begin to rust? Suddenly this man had the terrible sense that all his hopes for feeling substantial, powerful, successful, and secure, had vanished. The luxury car had put this man at greater risk in a world where kids come along on bicycles. Material things increased the man's fear and had become a barrier to his relationship with the Lord. That is why Jesus says if things derail you or prevent you from following Him, working for Him, and waiting for Him, *get rid of them*.

Dorothy Sayers remarked that Christians live with their bags packed! The Christian believer turns expectation into vocation. We do this decisively at our deaths, *and at the world's death*, which will come. But we also do it in a constant and ongoing way. Expectation occurs in all the decisions of life, when we must come after Jesus by not shrinking to follow Him through a thousand self-denials. For the Christian disciple there is the urgency of meeting Christ in every moment of life, not as a

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warning or threat, but as the promise of the One Who came that we might have life and have it more abundantly.