

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford at Stations and Benediction  
In Saint Theresa of Avila Church, West Roxbury  
Friday in the Fourth Week of Lent  
March 31, 2017

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Everyone who engages in a great undertaking knows how important it is to check supplies needed for the undertaking. Whether we are responsible for a business operation or going to college, or planning a vacation, or running a household makes no difference. It is necessary to take stock and do an inventory at the outset. If the venture is going to take a long time, a periodic equipment check along the way is also a must. That equipment must be in good working order. If you were about the climb Mt Everest you not only have your checklist, but you make very sure you understand the way in which your spikes and clips and ropes should be used. In any venture, it would be no good having cans without a can opener or equipment labeled in an unknown language.

It is no different with the spiritual life. Saint Bernard called the inner life of the Christian “the business of all businesses.” The spiritual life is no frosting on the cake, no option, no mere option to our practice of religion. Rather, the spiritual life *is* the very operation of the business of the soul. And many times this life has been compared to a great journey over roads which are often difficult, and in weather that is sometimes terrible. Having the right equipment available and *knowing how to use it* is essential to the success of the Christian life. Many people are quite badly prepared for the journey. They are impatient to “get on with it” or else the pace of life demands they never pause to examine the quality of their supplies, whether they have the right maps, or are even sure they know where they are going! No wonder when these people get into disabling miseries, or life reveals unmarked routes and offers unbalanced diets, the result is a complete loss of direction and starvation of soul. You do not need me to tell you life can throw you a curve ball now and then. You have to have the right maps.

For the past forty minutes you and I have been pouring over one of those right maps. Stations of the Cross is a highly detailed map. The New Testament gives us the grand sweep of the Lord’s Incarnate Life. The gospels imply, and sometimes admit, to this broad-brush approach. The gospels do not recount everything that happened along the Way with Christ. But then the pace slows down to a literal crawl for that journey from Pilate’s house to Calvary. After a three-year itinerant

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ministry conducted mostly out of the spotlight, the Passion is the time when Christ Jesus was made public for all mankind. This is the time when we see the character of the Divine Son as man: His human limitations and necessities, which He deliberately adopted in His plan of love. It was not Christ's plan to just be with us, as wonderful as that would be, but to *indwell* us as we are now.

And that is what draws us in. AS WE ARE NOW. The common themes in the lives of men and women include innocence overwhelmed by evil, betrayal, courage, cowardice, and loss. And *they are all there* in the fourteen incidents that make up Stations of the Cross. The art objects used as aids to praying this devotion vary from church to church. Sometimes they seem quaint or dated or otherwise unhelpful. In some churches they are breathtaking masterpieces. But Holy Church does not require pictures at all. All she asks for is fourteen individual crosses. Why? Because *the story itself is what draws us in*. It is the story that is defiantly contemporary. God Incarnate chose to experience all we do except sin. The Stations of the Cross are a map, not only reminding us of the historical Passion of Christ. Each Station is a little "time engine" connecting the Passion of Jesus to what is happening now in your life and mine. Through all ages and to the end of time His suffering is united to the suffering in His members.

Stations is not a publically shared spectacle. No general disclosure is made resulting in a congregational shout of "eureka" with light bulbs flashing over our procession. We may pray the Stations together as we have this evening. But the linkage is always private and personal. For Stations is not magic. We may pray swiftly or carelessly to get it over with. If we do, then each incident along the way of the Cross is not allowed to offer up its meaning and attachment to us. But when we are disposed to cooperate with grace, the transforming power of Divine Love makes contact. And on the *Via Crucis* each supplicant attends the Lord in His Passion and meets himself on the road through death to life. It is the right map. It guides us to where we want to go. And the right map always connects with the signs along the way.

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That is why we pray over and over again our thanks. We use special words of welcome, and of love as we do this. We say: "*We adore thee, O Christ, and we bless thee: Because by thy holy Cross thou hast redeemed the world.*"