

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 21, 2017

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Our Lord Jesus established the test of our Christianity. Since it is His religion and we want it, we have to take and pass the test. The Lord said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.” This is one of those propositions that is true in all its terms, even in its *converse*. A little later in His discourse Jesus gave that converse. He said, “He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me.”

To get us ready for the test, Blessed Jesus promises us His gift of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will be counselor, comforter, and advocate. Discipleship needs such a mentor. Almighty God has often warned, “My ways are not your ways, saith the Lord.” And then also, Christian discipleship is a form of “learning by doing.” Unlike the science of medicine where you learn about it, get an academic degree and license, and then begin the practice, we practice the sacred science of God by the ongoing conforming of our lives to the sound teaching and commandments of the Lord. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” We follow the way to get to the truth so we may have the life. Spiritual learning then cannot occur outside of actual experience. You can check out every book on swimming in the Boston Public Library and read every one of them. But sooner or later you have to get in the water. You can sign up for a course on trigonometry and schmooze the teacher. But soon or later you have to do the math. Spiritual learning is like that. We cannot learn about Divine Truth without doing truth.

Souls without Christ can hear about Him from people like you and me. Then they may begin doing what He says. And what does He say? He tells us to love one another, to forgive one another, and to refrain from judging one another. And something happens when we begin doing these things. Christian theology has an explanation for what happens. The “something happens” is *Someone*. Theology talks about the inner working of the Holy Spirit encouraging and prompting the definite act of our will, nudging us in the direction of Jesus Christ. Yet even before we know the theological explanation or jargon we experience the fact. It is in practicing the Christian virtues that we come to know them as attributes of God. The very power of these virtues introduces us in a direct and personal way to the

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God we seek. That happens even if we didn't know we were seeking God! The Holy Spirit is the *Divine nudge*.

It is the Holy Spirit Who does all that in us. He is quite the teacher, mentor, and guide! He leads us to Our Lord Jesus, Who shows us the Father. We want to know more about the Holy Spirit but He points us away from Himself to the Father through the Son. In Christian theology the Holy Spirit is said to proceed from the will of God. And since God's will is love, in the Holy Spirit we may especially perceive the infinite love of the Divine Being.

Chapter Six of *Genesis* is a long way downhill from the fall of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. By Chapter Six total depravity had set in. And yet in Chapter Six of *Genesis* we still read the Lord said, "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever." And we are *surprised!* We are surprised because by this time God was regretting He had ever made man. So at this *very late date* in the affairs of God and men we are surprised the Holy Spirit was *still striving* with man and longed to remain in the hearts of His poor sinful creatures. The justice and holiness of God would have withdrawn His Holy Spirit from these fallen miserable creatures. But His love would not.

This is the *very same Counselor* Jesus announces He is sending us. In His love, the Holy Spirit is willing, and even glad, to be with and dwell in the weakest and least lovable of souls. He is dwelling in our hearts even now. He is the greatest gift of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The greatest gift is not the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar. Remember again it is the Holy Spirit Who brings us Jesus Who brings us to the Father. And we are to spend our lives cooperating with this Holy Spirit so we may be guided by His Presence and thereby glorify the wonderful God Who chooses to dwell in us body and soul.

Any move you ever make towards God, any move you ever make to reach out in love to a fellow human being along the way, has been prompted by this Wonderful Counselor Who is promised to be with you forever, even this Spirit of Truth.