

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Seventh Sunday of Easter
May 28, 2017

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The Epistle to the Hebrews tells us in His human development Our Lord Jesus was made perfect through the things which He suffered. And as a result, “He became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him.” (5:9) *Nothing* is lacking in the ability of Our Lord Jesus Christ to deliver as He has promised. It also becomes evident we only need to obey Him, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and as a result of our obedience, all power in Heaven and on earth is unleashed by God Incarnate in order to save us.

The Lord Jesus in glory, ascended to the Right Hand of the Father in Heaven, has been given all things into His hands (*Matthew* 28:18). In today’s gospel we have a portion of the intercessory prayer of this Great Heavenly Priest. We get to listen in! In that prayer we are shown what Jesus intends for you and me. He makes clear we must have a life spiritually detached from the world. “I am praying for them: I am not praying for the world, but for those whom Thou hast given Me.” (*John* 17:9)

Why is it we must be detached from the world? The poor world certainly looks and acts as if it certainly *needs* our prayers and our involvement! The answer is the very term “**world**”, in Christian terminology, does not refer to a *place* so much as a *mindset*. The world mentality is geared towards division: drawing boundaries, building walls, and elevating primitive hostility into the status of national policies. It is very clear as we read the Scriptures and listen to the living voice of Christ in His Church that we are called to an entirely different order.

It all reminds me of a book that was summer reading one year in my college days. It was called *Bhowani Junction*, a novel by John Masters. They made a movie of it with a voluptuous Ava Gardner as the heroine. Stick to the novel! The story was set on life at a railroad junction in British India. In it were three main types of characters: British colonials who wished they were back home, Indians who were emulating the British system (for better or worse), and other Indians who wanted the British to get out. The Brits were well prepared by their secondary schools back home for the “burden of empire.” So they brought their rugby with them and afternoon teatime, and discovered quinine water mixes well with gin. These traditions helped them cling to British identity in all sorts of strange places and situations.

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What the Christian does is very similar. “Here we have no continuing city” (*Hebrews* 13:14). We are conditioned by Christ and His Gospel never to give in to the worldly mentality even though we find ourselves living in strange places and circumstances. Remember Thoreau’s saying if you observe someone out of step it is perhaps he is marching to the beat of a different drum. We are told our essential identity is never to be forgotten or merged with the worldview. Furthermore, we are called to assert the Gospel again and again in a fractured world that actually *requires* the good news of Jesus Christ.

It is an essential characteristic of Christian discipleship that we are primarily misfits in the world rather than totally acceptable to it. As a result we will be subject to a certain amount of ridicule. In the novel, there is a description of a British colonial service official wearing a thick wool suit beautifully tailored in Savile Row. But the clothing was developed for the late January end-of-season shoot in Norfolk. It was not intended to be worn trampling about in the blistering heat of the Indian subcontinent! The suit was the official’s connection with his identity even in tropical Asia. But he nevertheless looked funny and out of place wearing it.

Our attachment to Jesus Christ makes us look funny and out of place. No matter. Christ’s intercessory prayer makes it clear we must live a life spiritually detached from the allurements and folly of the secular world. His prayer, recorded by St John, is a type of Christ’s perpetual intercession in Heaven. That means *it is as true now as then* that blessed Jesus prays not for the world but for them which God has given Him out of the world. And when we yield to the ways of the secularist mindset we forfeit the prayers of Our Divine Intercessor and thwart the plans of this powerful Saviour to accomplish our salvation.

So we must claim the continued presence and prayer of our Great High Priest. While living in the world we are to concentrate on things above: on prayer, on good works for the souls around us, on the sacraments, which arm us with grace to live and know the Heavenly realm even now. Jesus does not desert us, nor does His prayer for us ever change. Right from the beginning it is said the apostles “knew the Lord working with them, and confirming the word.” (*Mark* 16:20)

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God made us for spiritual advancement. And Our Lord is always praying that we be kept safe from distractions and remain focused on salvation.