

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Fifth Sunday after Trinity
July 16, 2017

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Saint Luke's Day is October 18th. On that day at Mass a lesson from 2nd Timothy is read. The situation is this: St Paul is in a Rome prison. In the last chapter of his letter Paul writes these words "Demas hath left me, loving this present world. Only Luke is with me." We read this passage as a reminder of St Luke's faithfulness to Paul. But what about Demas? We know practically nothing about him. What little there is to know makes us cringe. We surmise it must have been a painful and unhappy episode. St Luke chronicles Paul's missionary activity with the meticulousness of a professional historian. But Luke left out the details of what happened with Demas. We can guess why. Demas had probably also been *Luke's* personal friend and colleague. Feelings were running deep.

If St Luke skipped over the matter why should we remember this little bit of dirty laundry on a day not even close to October 18th? The answer is today's Gospel. Our Lord Jesus tells us the parable of the sower. In it we learn the disposition of God is the same to all of us. The seed is scattered equally and everywhere. The variable, Jesus warns, is in the *four different mindsets* receiving the Gospel message. In the parable the Lord compares these mindsets to four soil conditions receiving the seed that is scattered. And one of these soils is full of thorns and weeds which allow the seed to sprout but then chokes off the young plants. By coincidence, that may be what is happening right now to the young carrots in your garden!

Demas, like Judas Iscariot before him, fits the description of the soil full of weeds. With Luke, Demas had been an assistant to St Paul. Demas had accompanied Paul on his journeys. When Paul found himself in prison, Demas and Luke naturally offered what comfort and assistance they could. But the legal process apparently dragged on. Some things never change! So there was an enforced lack of missionary work. All the plans and preachments were in limbo. As a consequence, Demas had little to do. Perhaps this is a case of "idleness being the devil's workshop!" But in some way Demas became more attracted to the world than to the gospel. It is not necessary to read some juicy immorality into this situation. But whatever happened, we can guess the sad scenario. Demas' visits to St Paul in prison became sporadic after once having been frequent and helpful. One day the

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visits stopped completely. Paul, in chains, and in need of encouragement, now shared the suffering of his Divine Master whose Own familiar friend Judas had betrayed Him. Sadly Paul wrote to Timothy. “Demas hath left me; only Luke is with me.” And we shudder.

We shudder because the seed, representing the Word of God in the parable, could fall on us in vain. We could give it growth in the white heat of excitement. And then the love of God’s gift could be overcome by the stubbornness and hardness of our self-centered hearts and our sins. Like Demas, who once took his religion seriously, you and I are not immune to the dangers and allurements of the secular world.

Of course this is nothing new! In every saint and saint-in-the-making, habits of self-indulgence always have the ability to enervate spiritual resources and do it so subtly we are not aware of it happening. The lives of the saints testify to this failing. Demas did not wake up one day and decide to desert St Paul! More likely it just happened, *and it happens easily*. Smart money might even bet Demas then found a way to *blame St Paul* for the break and describe himself as the victim. Again, some things never change!

The parable of the sower warns us. Take stock periodically of your spiritual inventory. Watch out for worldly encroachments. Be on guard for all those things (many of which are good and necessary) which nevertheless cut into your attention and obligation to the things of Almighty God. Remember it isn’t always bad things that separate us from God but good things. The devil works both sides of the street!

You and I are followers of Jesus Christ. Demas could have said that. *Once*. And long before Demas became a casualty, Jesus described one type of follower as receiving His Word among thorns. “That is he who hears the word, but the cares of the world and the delight in riches choke the word and it proves unfruitful.” We pray then for the grace to be freed from all worldliness and anxiety, that we may be the good soil that brings forth fruit in due season, that having endured the temptations of this present world humbly and with perseverance, we may be accepted into the heavenly rest.