

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Third Sunday after Trinity  
July 2, 2017

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The Lord Jesus says His yoke is easy and His burden light. But how can His disciples be called upon to take up their cross and deny themselves in order to follow Him? When we think of “light” and “easy” it is “light in calories” and “easy payment plans.” But the Cross seems the very symbol of defeat, degradation, and death.

To think this way is to take the Cross out of the context of the Lord’s Incarnation: His life, death, and resurrection. When a Hollywood movie puts out a preview the producer wants you to buy a ticket to see the whole movie. The Church does not put out movie previews! But she does lay before us the whole human condition without Christ and says *this* is what is playing at a theatre near you: greed, depravity, cruelty, and fear. It all stems from not knowing who we are or where we are going. If the Church puts out a preview in order to get us to consider the Gospel good news, it is that we look at our surroundings and at ourselves. As our response to an honest assessment of the world the Church insists we take in the whole picture about Christ and His Cross. When we do that we see we are not being asked to struggle endlessly under the pain of a first-century Roman execution procedure.

When Christ came the mystery of God’s great, unfathomable, mercy was translated into a language we could grasp. That understandable language was the living of a perfect human life. That perfect life, and the coming of it, had been foretold long ago in the Old Testament. Only a few people understood the preparation. On the road to Emmaus the Risen Lord Himself said “O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken.” And beginning with Moses, He opened to them the scriptures, and what they said about Himself. (Luke 24:25-27)

Nobody at the time knew Psalm 103 was about Jesus Christ: “For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his steadfast love towards those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.”

This psalm describes the great shadow of God’s goodness thrown across the world. The psalm shows us two vast lines, one reaching from earth to heaven and the

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other from east to west. And where these two lines meet they form the shadow of the Cross. God's steadfast love was always throwing this shadow on the whole world. It is a *vast* shadow, but in the fullness of time there was also a certain place. The place was called *Golgotha*. The place where God's goodness meets our sin is in Christ's Cross.

I am told if you draw a violin bow across a china plate you will hear the sound of a chord. And that if the plate has a little sand on it, the sand will form into a symmetrical pattern. The combination of the vibration of the chord and the shape of the plate will have done that. I do not know who thinks these things up! But the perfect life of Jesus Christ has had that kind of effect in the world. His life played the music of Heaven in our world, and when the music stopped the pattern of the Cross was left behind. It was left behind not as a figure in the sand or as a memory but as the pattern for your life and mine. The Cross brings harmony, shape, direction, and of course judgment and forgiveness, to all that we do. It is a life in which divine grace crosses and contradicts the actions of our sinful but redeemed human nature. This grace involves a surrender of our old self. It makes us love what our sinful nature hates and hate what sinfulness desires.

Surrender to Christ is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and without the power of the Holy Spirit we will not accept, and could not possibly accept and bear, the Cross. But once taken up, that Cross provides life, with an ebb and flow that is paradise itself. And there is no second place for the old life in self-centeredness.

So how can Christ's yoke be light and easy when it involves the Cross? The Gospel tells us the Way of the Cross went beyond Calvary to the empty tomb and the Resurrection. Christ did not carry a cross on the *Via dolorosa* forever. Nor do His followers. The purpose of a journey is to arrive at the destination. The whole reason for our cross is to end as it did for our Lord Jesus: gloriously, in new life, risen, which for us means closer to God.

The Lord assured us He came that we might have life and have it more abundantly. And this more abundant life we cannot have without Him.