

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Septuagesima
January 28, 2018

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The reputation Our Lord Jesus gained during His ministry was based upon three things: His *authority*, the *wisdom* of His teaching, and His *miracles*. These three things drew attention to this wandering preacher from Galilee and set Him apart. It is equally clear in the gospels Our Lord seemed to *conceal* His true identity as the Son of God. He swore His closest disciples to secrecy on the subject and in today's gospel passage we hear Him silencing the demons when they recognize Him. A person healed by Jesus as told not to tell anyone and when the news did spread it forced the Lord to change His itinerary. He spent more time avoiding cities and teaching in the countryside. And we wonder about all that. To those of us who think advertising is a great evangelical tool, the Lord's secrecy seems a strange way to inaugurate the Kingdom of God on earth!

Then we remember. Christ came to die in our place in order to save us from our sins. His death would have the power to call us to repentance and reconciliation with our Heavenly Father. None of that would have happened had Jesus agreed to the demands of the people. They wanted a personal healer and brilliant teacher to confirm their own sense of personal well-being. There is nothing like having the e-mail address of a charismatic leader in your p.c! We would all like someone we can contact when needed in the pursuit of our own self-promotion.

It surprises some, but that was not why God came down from Heaven and became man! So Jesus lived quietly as He worked His way towards the Cross. He worked miracles as quietly as possible and did indeed often ask for silence about them. The miracles He did were either necessary as an essential part of the translation of the Gospel into action, or they were the result of His compassionate nature in the face of suffering.

There is no greater challenge to the Christian proclamation than the contrast and conflict between Jesus' teaching about the Fatherhood of God and the suffering and pain in the world. Christians and non-Christians alike marvel at the fact that in His insisting that God is our Father Jesus did not disregard the world's tragedies. Rather, He took them upon Himself and as a man wrestled with every evil we may be called to endure. He didn't remain in those beautiful Christmas cards you recently put away. There were suspicions, false accusations, rejection by His own

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hometown, hunger, cold, temptations of the devil in every part of His human nature. The Lord suffered hatred of His enemies and betrayal of His friends, and the loneliness of being forgotten by God. You and I can never say “you don’t understand” to the Lord Jesus Christ! Every horror that can fall on us fell on Him and at the end of it all He stood in the garden of St Joseph of Arimathaea on Easter morning victorious over all. That is the Gospel proclamation.

Our Lord’s revelation is good news because enduring all the world can throw at us He still proclaimed joyfully God is our loving Father. Pain and sorrow such as we experience are part of the disorder of fallen human nature. You don’t need me tell you about that disorder! But that is where we live, in faith, hope, and charity. In that life Christ Jesus was both our pioneer in pain and master over it. The gospel good news is that through Jesus we too will master pain and suffering.

The Lord’s miracles are a sign it is not God’s intention that we suffer, but that even when we do, we are to know that the One Who loves us infinitely is in control. We have to observe not everyone receives a miraculous cure. That was because Our Lord had a destiny with the Cross. Yet we see Him in the Gospels much like a nurse tip-toeing through a vast hospital ward of sleeping children, taking care not to disturb them. But once in a while seeing a child tossing in the fits of a nightmare, the nurse stops, and this child He will awaken and comfort.

You and I live in the first age of the Kingdom of Heaven inaugurated on earth. Suffering is still very much with us. Christ became our leader in suffering. But the assurance that God is our Father never faltered on His lips. That God is compassionate and a lover of souls is seen in the Lord’s working of miracles. It is also seen in the abiding ministry of healing in the medical and social service institutions of the Catholic Church. It is seen in churches and shrines worldwide where you notice stacks of crutches and canes and other memorials of marvelous recoveries. For God does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men. But He *does* desire we turn from our sins and be saved.