

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Good Friday
March 30, 2018

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On occasion in the confessional I ask a penitent if he has a crucifix at home. The answer is invariably *yes*. I do not ask about a cross but a crucifix. Often we have a crucifix mounted on a wall, and yours may be a real work of art. Quite apart from their spiritual value, we may call a crucifix beautiful and valuable for the craftsmanship in the choice and treatment of the wood and the fine details and portrayal, the painting and gilding and the use of precious stones.

But in Passiontide we *veil* the crucifix and statues in churches, or else they have been removed where possible. In this season, and especially on Good Friday, we are asked to make the effort to place ourselves directly before the Tree of Beauty that was raised on Calvary. That is something different from the crucifix we see all year long. This Cross was rough and unfinished wood. To it was fastened the body of a living man. Great spikes have pierced the man's hands and feet. They pin Him to the wood like a butterfly mounted on a display board. The body of this man is bruised and gashed raw from the brutal beating He has endured. The pain and enormous strain on His spread arms has drained the blood from His head. This is Jesus on the Cross. It isn't a beautiful work of art. But *valuable*? You and I could gather all the world's wealth from the beginning of time, and the total amount would not hold a candle to the value of the original Good Friday crucifix.

It is not the Cross itself but *the man hanging on the cross* Who makes all the difference, and forever. Who is He? That is the exciting part! He is God's Own Son become man. He is perfect. He is perfect in holiness and perfect in love. And how did He get here? It was out of love for the entire human race. Not love for just *all* of us but for *each* of us, each who has or ever will have human existence. And part of the exciting thing is that although we have rebelled against Him, He yet calls us His friends.

So on Good Friday, with everything else veiled, you and I stand before the true Cross. Like the Eucharist Itself, Good Friday is *God's time*, not chronological time. The Body hanging there isn't a work of art made of wood or stone or precious metal. The figure is a living man. And He looks down at you and me and asks, "This I have done for thee: what doest thou for Me?" Your beautiful crucifix at

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home does that too. It asks the same question. But more often you do not hear it as you fix your hat or adjust your tie and quickly go out the door.

Good Friday does not seek to stir up a once-a-year synthetic emotion. The man on the Cross is playing for keeps. He asks us to place our whole lives in His hands. There can be no territory where the King's writ does not rule. We rebel. That is in our blood line all the way back to Adam and Eve. We think no one has the right to ask us to do what hurts or give up what we wish to keep. So we build our clever case for excluding God from certain areas of our lives, much as the first man wished to expel God and His tree from the garden. But it won't wash. Even *before* Good Friday, excuses never worked. From the get-go our Creator has absolute rights over His creation.

But Good Friday reveals something more. The man on the Cross is not the result of ordinary justice carried out. This man deals with us on the basis of condemnation *and* loving kindness. *Both*. He demands sacrifice. Ours won't match His of course, but He does not expect it to. But His gift to us will be all out of proportion to the meager response we make in turning to Him. When the prodigal son returned to the father and made his confession, He tried to tell the father what to do in response. "Make me one of your hired servants." But the father would have none of it. He had seen his son in filthy rags far way. But now he called for the best robe and jewelry. The prodigal must be a repentant son. But he can only return as a son. That, said Jesus, is what your Heavenly Father is like.

You may not kneel before your crucifix at home. But you will do it here on Good Friday. The Lord's hands and feet bear the marks of nails. But remember that His demands are always made in love. *And you have decided to go with this man.*