

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Twentieth Sunday after Trinity
October 14, 2018

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The four gospels reveal the methods used by Our Lord Jesus to win souls. He customized His approach to the condition of each person. All of us hear the one Gospel proclaimed. Each of us is nourished by the same sacraments. But the Lord is *The Great Physician*. He knows perfectly what graces need to be applied to each individual soul.

When the rich man (St Mark implies he is not a *young* man) comes to Jesus for direction the Lord tells him to follow the commandments. Now of course that is a no brainer. *All* of us must follow the commandments. But the man is now engaged in conversation. He says, “Yes, I have done that.” This response gives the Lord the opportunity to individualize the prescription. Jesus invites the rich man to divest himself of his possessions and join the band of disciples. Once general spiritual applications are *individualized* they invariably hit us where we hurt. Our Lord saw where this man needed to grow; it was an area where he was most attached and perhaps a bit dishonest and defensive about as well. That area did indeed hurt. And we are told “he went away sorrowful.”

It is a remarkable thing that within the space of four verses Our Lord Jesus is recorded as offering *two different approaches* to salvation. He has just declared “whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it.” (10:15) And now (10:19) the Lord says to the rich man, “You know the commandments,” implying that following the law is the way to inherit eternal life. In *Richard II* Shakespeare has the king bewail that “thoughts of things divine are intermixed, and do set the Word itself against the Word.” Here then is the question. Is salvation a free gift, as to a child, *or* is it something we earn by good conduct, following rules of religion?

After the rich man’s departure, the apostles asked Jesus about this matter. And the Lord reflects on the problem, saying that those who have left houses and families for the sake of the Gospel will receive an hundredfold. But Peter and the others had *not* given up either houses or families. The rich man was told to give up his possessions. But Jesus did *not* require this of other perspective disciples who had wealth. What we have here is rather an indication that *in each case* the Lord

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diagnoses the problem and zeros in on the solution to whatever roadblock is in the path of a soul's discipleship.

What about us? There are obstacles which hinder each of us from making a wholehearted response to Jesus Christ. And chances are that for us, as for the rich would-be disciple in the gospel passage, these are places of attachment where some defensiveness, and a lack of clear sight, can lead to dishonesty in the matter. There may be shyness, or fear of what people may say. We may dislike strictness and authority over us, or be afraid of our own lack of resolve. We may despair of our high calling and the generousness of a gospel which seems too good to be true. If we really understood the power of the grip of such attachments on the soul we would understand our absolute helplessness in the spiritual battle. Our Lord said "with man it is not possible, *but not with God.*"

Jesus told the rich man not only "sell what you have" but "come, follow Me." Caught up in his attachment to wealth and therefore in a hurry to get away from Jesus, the man didn't hear the good news. "Come, follow Me" means "I will be with you. I will guide you, and I will make it all possible for you to do what on your own you could never do."

This is a lesson we must all learn. When Moses was taken aback by his own high calling, God said, "I have made thee *a god* to Pharaoh." (Ex 7:1) A thousand years later God Incarnate was still teaching the same lesson to four fishermen after an unsuccessful night on the lake. The Lord's instruction ran counter to everything they knew about fishing. Peter must have shook his head wearily while saying, "Nevertheless at Thy word I will let down the net." And the rest, as they say, is history!

Our Lord is indeed *The Great Physician*. He is more than able to make you and me strong enough and wise enough to succeed in our venture for His glory.