

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity
October 21, 2018

+

There was an old Aramaic proverb about the meek inheriting the earth. The gist of it was advice to little people to keep their heads down while the big shots bumped each other off. Then the small fry could crawl out of the rubble and claim what's left! If Our Blessed Lord used this source material in His *Beatitudes*, He took out the cynicism! That the meek shall inherit the earth is given to us as a sacred principle because this is how Almighty God set up the universe. God's created order reflects the love and giving of the Holy Trinity. As a consequence, there is no way any followers of Jesus Christ can experience a relationship with God as long as their mind set is on gaining power and dominance. That is the response of God Incarnate to the request of James and John. When they ask the modern political and self-serving question: "what's in it for us?", the Lord replies, "You do not know what you are asking."

You remember the rich man and would-be disciple *fled* before hearing the good news. James and John stuck around. And the Lord gently brought them along. That is good news for us as well. We need to stick around and be gently brought along. Jesus loved giving nicknames, and called the sons of Zebedee "*Boanerges*" meaning "**sons of thunder**." They had strong and determined temperaments and a low boiling point. James and John were the apostolic equivalent of Admiral David Farragut, whose statute you can see on your drive out to Castle Island. You remember the admiral's famous line at Mobile Bay. "Damn the torpedoes; full steam ahead." For their part, James and John once invited Jesus to hurl hailstones and coals of fire on a village which had rejected the Lord's teaching. These "sons of thunder" were also making a power play for the best seats in the Lord's cabinet. So why did they get special treatment?

James and John were the most ardent and enthusiastic of all the apostles to get to wherever Jesus was going. When they reported for duty by saying "We are able" there was something splendid about their confident and brash assertion. The Lord did not reject their assertion. Rather, He took such lofty ambition and consecrated it to His Own service. Jesus can do that. He can work with a determined will, a dominating temperament, and a powerful ambition. These are often the very raw ingredients out of which saints are made.

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity
October 21, 2018

+

So the key to success for James and John was that they were *devoted to Jesus*. Their ambition was not *blind* ambition. It was always focused on their Master. Yes, they wanted chief seats in the Lord's kingdom, but they wanted them *next to Jesus* in His glory. And so for the Lord, the task was not to change the field of vision in these two strong men, but to do a bit of fine tuning.

Remaining with Jesus, James and John would learn that those who seek dominance are in the end victimized by it, and that God supports those who serve. That is because love and service are the highest manifestations of divine authority. The Lord Jesus showed this in His life and especially in His death, and the emphasis is recorded on every page of the gospels.

You and I do not fully know how God is working to direct our strong natural raw qualities towards the prizes of Heaven. But we know that as we turn over all of our personality and mannerisms and proclivities to the Lord's guidance and consecration, then we too will have the right to hope for Heaven. God Incarnate is a servant. And He said "Follow Me." For the Christian the path is clear. *Our path is the path of servanthood*. It is a path that, please God, leads to the greatest success of all, the success to which James and John aspired, and for which our souls, like theirs, were created: *To be with Jesus*.