

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Good Friday
April 19, 2019

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And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying “*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?*” which is, being interpreted, “*My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*”

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The first three words from the Cross were spoken for others. But the fourth word is different. This is conversation between Father and Son. Because it was spoken in a loud voice, and St John heard it, we get to listen in. We try to understand. We grapple with what is meant by Jesus bearing the sins of the world. In liturgy we use the words differently. We recall Jesus *takes away* the sins of the world. What does it mean for Him to *bear* the sins of the world? Our response to the fourth word from the Cross forces us to think about the life and work of God Incarnate at a deeper level. Good Friday is a day to think at a deeper level.

Try to image all the sins in thought, word, and deed, committed by the entire population of the City of Boston in a twenty-four hour period being deliberately allowed to pass through your own soul! The constant and concentrated foulness of all these sins, and with no respite or alleviation, is more than anyone could possibly bear. The sheer moral and spiritual weight of sin of one city for one day is staggering beyond comprehension. Yet Blessed Jesus, hanging on the Cross, bore the sins of all men, of all cities, *for all time*. It is the dying Lord Jesus, carrying this never-lifting load, with sin after sin heaped upon Him, Who cries to His heavenly Father, “*My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?*”

The spotless soul of the beautiful Lord is bound to this awful load. Think of a living body tied to a corpse! It is worse than a *Hollywood* horror movie. Our Lord looked back up the history of the past and down the whole history of the future. God Incarnate can do that. He knew His mystical Body is all stained and soiled. If I am in mortal sin and have not gone to confession that is what I have done to Jesus through my soul. And you can say that too. We have tied His loving body to our dead body. That is a consequence of what we believe about Baptism. We believe Jesus made you and me a living part of Him. And we take that as good news. But

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His mystical Body, the Body into which you and I were grafted at Baptism, dies limb by limb, like a physical body nailed to a cross, as first you and I, then someone else, falls into sin. *The First Epistle of Peter* describes the transaction this way: “Who His Own self bare our sins in His Own Body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by Whose stripes ye were healed.” (2:24) Much earlier and looking way ahead, *Isaiah* proclaimed the same. “The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (53:6)

This is Good Friday. So where is the good? It is that our souls are to be washed clean in *The Precious Blood*. Many people recoil at that fact. But the difficulty is not because of the Precious Blood! It is difficult because of human pride, shame, and indifference, and the diversionary tactics we attempt to wiggle out of the gospel claims. Hearts not won by Christ may try good works. They even tried that on Good Friday! “And they offered Him wine mingled with myrrh, but He received it not.” (*Mark* 15:23) Why did Jesus refuse? In the universe there are two methods for dealing with evil. The people offering Jesus a sedative were only proposing to mitigate the horrors of a situation beyond their control. That’s the first method. They saw their offer as a good work. But it was a *diversionary tactic*. The world is good at offering diversionary tactics! The second method was at work on Good Friday. Our Lord Jesus was *destroying evil at its roots*. You and I must choose between God on a Cross and a man offering a pain killer!

We look presentable enough to each other. But we don’t have to convince one another! *How does God see you?* Does He see our dead bodies strapped to His Beloved Son? Does He see us foul and deformed, scarred even though healed? Christians come a long way when they finally arrive at a point where they see sin as Jesus sees it, and see what it does to Him, and have an aversion and horror of it and are repulsed by it for His sake.

In the fourth word from the Cross Jesus went to the lowest depths to which man comes. In that place He laid a foundation on which we may safely pass. However greatly mired in sorrow and shame or pride we may be, our condition is not bottomless. No life is hopeless. Jesus went lower still. So that we might pass over into life.

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Today is the Friday of the Passion and Death of Our Lord Jesus Christ. It is commonly called *Good Friday*. And why is that? Because what was done for you and me is *the best!*