

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Third Sunday of Lent
March 24, 2019

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God is Spirit. This is one of those magnificent revelations of the Divine Nature. In one way or another this affirmation is found all through the Holy Scriptures. And so it is what Our Lord Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well. The One Who is in a position to know says in God there are no material things which can modify or change in any way the absolute and infinite perfection of His Nature. Jesus wasn't giving a classroom lecture to the woman at the well! What He gave her was for practical application. You and I must worship God in spirit and in truth. Our approach must be purified from our clinging to material things, and filled, as far as possible for us, with true worship and love. Jesus assures the woman, "We worship what we know."

It is important to understand the word *knowledge* when it is used in a spiritual context. Now my sermon is not going to be a lecture on *Gnosticism*! You can read for yourselves about this ancient fungus which tried to attach itself to Christianity. If you think of Jesus of Nazareth as the Batman comic strip for religious folks, you are on the right track in the wrong religion! But the Gnostic sponge for borrowing Christian terminology to promote its own beliefs is still with us. Nowadays "health care" insurance mandates provisions for abortion, which most of us call murder and not health care. And sodomy is now legally called marriage. That is all in the Gnostic playbook. But you don't need a Sunday sermon about all that.

Knowledge is ordinarily understood as synonymous with *information*. Religious doctrine is the Church's gift. It is her responsibility to us to translate higher realities into informational terms. Right now throughout the Catholic Church men and women, boys and girls, are preparing for reception, confirmation, and first communion. They are undergoing a period of intellectual training in this sense. But this information, under the heading of sacred doctrine, is not an *end* but the *means* to spiritual knowledge. Spiritual knowledge does not end with communicated ideas but with *experience of God Himself*.

Somewhere in the world there may still be a man who has never seen or head of an automobile. You could show him your car. He would say "What is that?" You would reply "It's a car." Now the man has some information. But he has no experience. So you proceed to open the doors and pop the hood and trunk. The

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man gains more information. And if he wants more still, you could give him a tool kit and allow him to take your car apart, spread the parts out in an orderly way, and see that it is made up of steel, plastic, oil, and rubber. He would see that some of the parts move when connected to each other. The man now has a great amount of information about an automobile.....and you hope he can put your car together again! But he still has no experience. Then you give him the ignition key so he can make the car move, and he puts it in gear and drives it. The man has to experience driving if his information about the car is going to amount to anything.

A car is more than the sum of its parts. And what is true about automobiles has more profound implications when we talk about living beings. The experience I have of any one of you only *begins* with mere information. And you would not be satisfied if my knowledge of you was limited to an abstract set of statistics. Our Lord Jesus says this is also true with our Heavenly Father. Knowing God means more than having information about Him. Doctrine is necessary. Right thinking guides us towards knowledge. But knowing God means being involved in personal relationship with Our Heavenly Father. Jesus instructs that we worship God from the core of our being and not from a place external to ourselves. God cannot be reached from a Gnostic side show. He can only be reached from a human heart. "Take it from Me, Jesus tells the Samaritan woman. "We worship what we know."

You could give someone every tool necessary to take a car apart. But until you gave him the ultimate tool, the ignition key, he would never experience the car. That is what Jesus told the woman at the well. "I am that ultimate tool; I am that key to God. Until you have Me, you won't know God."

With Jesus Christ we enter kinship with Almighty God, Who otherwise remains impersonal and remote in spite of all the information we can collect from the prophets and scribes and *The Catechism*. The whole apparatus of the Catholic Church, her sacraments, sacred writings, doctrines, apostolic order, primacy of Peter, canon law, and rubrics for saying Mass, all exist for one purpose. It is to encourage and effect our conformation to Christ until He is formed in us. And it is Christ in us Who brings us to the Father.