

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Seventh Sunday of Easter
June 2, 2019

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There are *two* Lord's Prayers recorded in the New Testament. The first is the prayer Jesus taught His disciples to pray and universally known as the "Our Father." The second is the much longer prayer the Lord allowed to be heard as He and His disciples passed through Jerusalem after the Last Supper. Jesus prayed as they walked through the Temple Court and out of the city towards Gethsemane. For many people this prayer of self-dedication is the most sacred passage in the Bible. You just heard a portion of the end of this prayer as our Mass Gospel today. And parts of this prayer turned up at weekday Masses this past week.

Jesus prays: "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou has given Me, be with Me where I am." Throughout His ministry the Lord set the example of our being less concerned in prayers with asserting wishes for ourselves, and more *definite*, *determined*, and *deliberate* in asking for good things for others. Several hours after praying this prayer, Jesus gave a supreme example of intercessory prayer. In Gethsemane He would pray to the Father: "Not My will but Thine be done."

On the way to Gethsemane Our Lord's heart and thoughts were focused on His disciples. He was praying for Christians, not just the disciples who were with Him but for *all* "Who believe in Me through their word." Jesus prays: "Father, I desire that they also may be with Me where I am." That is where *we* come in! And down the ages the Church has followed the great example of her Lord. Many of the saints offering spiritual direction have insisted upon detachment from our own personal plans and interests as an essential ingredient in our growing ability to help others.

Our Heavenly Father looks on the oneness of humanity even as He knows each individual soul as precious in His sight. But there is much in us which resists helping others! One of the tragic aspects of our fallen-but-redeemed human nature is that we do not see as God sees. We focus on separateness and alienation. It is our *differences* from each other which always leap to our attention. Our concentration on differences breeds all the nasty characteristics most of us would deny or disown if we could. They turn up on your laundry list every time you go to confession!

The Lord Jesus Christ knows what we need. In His prayer of self-dedication Jesus prays to the Father that we be *one*. This is not unity for its own sake. Jesus prays

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“That they may be one *as we are one*.” The power to be converted and to convert others is not our unity as such. Rather, as a consequence of *our union with Christ in the Holy Trinity* we have the Divine Life flowing in us. Remember our Lord’s teaching: “I am the Vine; ye are the branches. Without Me ye can do nothing.”

Never underestimate the devotional life and try to minimize or ignore the hard work required. Our prayer life is vital in importance for salvation. Its quality is crucial: both for its potential to comfort and strengthen *us*, and to promote the intention of Christ to *reach others through us*. That is why Jesus allowed His great intercessory prayer, His “other” Lord’s Prayer, to be heard by His disciples as they passed through Jerusalem on the night before Good Friday. He saved the good stuff for last! We are to learn the sacred science of Christ’s Own relationship with the Father. Then we are to make it our own. The Lord says, “These things I speak in the world that they might have My joy fulfilled in themselves.” *We want Christ’s joy*. It is Christ’s joy in us that is the only thing which draws us and others to Him.