

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost
August 11, 2019

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You and I don't use the phrase "gird your loins" very often. Nor do we offer the advice to "keep your lamps burning." The instructions Our Lord gives use language that is clearly archaic to our ears. And so it is tempting to discount the instructions. "Roll up your sleeves" might be a better rendering of the meaning of the first phrase. But "always keep extra lights bulbs on hand" lacks the force of the Lord's directions!

Blessed Jesus is instructing His followers in every age to live in expectation and readiness for His coming again. We are to look forward to that coming, and eagerly await it. That must be our *attitude*. But there must also be *action*. We are to prepare for the Lord's coming and, if possible, *hasten* it! Following the Lord's instructions, and those of His great saints, we are to live as though each moment were the last before judgement day. The Lord says judgement will come. The profitable question is not "*when?*" but "What are you doing right now and how would it be different if you knew it was to be *the very last act of your life?*" Assisting at Mass would not be so different, but what about your actions one hour ago or one hour from now?

This business about loins girded and lamps burning is not so archaic after all! With Jesus as our Master and we His servants, we are to be working servants, *not idle ones*. Having our garments tucked up means not to hinder activity on His behalf. Having our lamps burning means to be filled with the oil of the Holy Ghost, and burning with the love of God and man, and with zeal for the work of Christ's Kingdom. Of course there is no one way to do this: no one right way, although there certainly are *wrong* ways! Your opportunities may differ from mine and one another's, even as we have many that are the same. But in each case Christians will have an identifying characteristic: they are *working* servants and they are *waiting* servants. They are working in the Master's house and doing Him the honor of waiting upon Him.

Our Lord says it is important to work and wait for Him as our basic attitude and purpose. That is so important that we must, if necessary to that end, sell everything we have. Give up the things you are attached to in life. This isn't a *moral* teaching. If it were, all the followers of Christ in every age would have to live in extreme

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poverty. We know that many disciples, from the very beginning, had great possessions. Rather, Our Lord is giving us practical *spiritual* instruction. He is not telling us if we own a four-slice toaster and an *espresso* machine we cannot inherit the kingdom of Heaven! But we do have to abandon any and every thing which prevents us from working and waiting for Christ. As you know, it is not money but the *love* of money that is the root of all evil.

The world is full of traps to lure us into false security and away from the Lord. A man who worked hard and made money decided to reward himself with a luxury automobile. He thought the car would give him security and sense of well-being. But security and well-being come from the Lord, and not from material things. Two things happened to the man with the new car. First, his auto insurance rate *doubled!* And second, one day his parked car was sideswiped by a boy on a bicycle, leaving a long and deep scratch the whole length of one side, right down to the metal. The man could report the accident to his insurance agent and risk an even *higher* premium. Or he could do nothing and let his beautiful new car rust. Or he could pay out of pocket for the bodywork and paint job. Suddenly he had a terrible sense that all his hopes for feeling successful and secure were misplaced. His new car put him at greater risk in a world where kids come along on bikes. Material things had increased his fear and become a barrier to his relationship to the Lord. And that is why Jesus says if things derail you or prevent you from following Him *get rid of them.*

Dorothy L. Sayers once remarked “Christian live with their bags packed.” So you and I have our modern versions of “loins girded and lamps burning.” In every age our marching orders are the same. The Christian believer turns expectation into vocation. Expectation occurs in all the decisions of life when we come to Jesus through a thousand self-denials. For us there is the urgency of meeting Christ in every moment of life, not as a warning or threat, but coming to the One Who came that we might have life, and have it more abundantly.