

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Septuagesima Sunday  
February 9, 2020

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A price is always being paid for everything. This is something the secular world only admits selectively. A healthy timber wolf is a magnificent-looking animal and a great parent. A wolf is also a precision killing machine. A wolf that did not kill other equally beautiful animals would not be good looking for very long, or a good parent. There is always a price paid for being alive.

This isn't just "the law of the jungle." No matter how gently and compassionately we live, you and I live off someone else's suffering. That began when you were born at the expense of your mother's labor pains. When you paid "below dealer's cost" for your new automobile it may have meant someone else down the line did not generate sufficient income to clothe his children properly for the winter. Sacrifice is a complex part of the fabric of existence. There is a ripple effect. We live off someone else's suffering.

Christians know that at the high point of creation this pattern was revealed in the price of redemption on Good Friday. Saint Paul reminds us "You were bought with a price." (*1 Cor. 6:20*) The Cross of Christ is the price for our being alive. That is a fact we acknowledge and are glad. It is why the day Christ died is called "Good Friday." But then there is *something else* in the relationship. Our Lord Jesus told us to take up *our* cross and follow Him. What that means is we are to permit other people to live off our suffering just as Jesus did.

Pliny the Elder lived from 23/24-79 AD. He famously observed "Nothing is more useful than salt and sunshine." Salt is both an *enhancer* and *preserver*. It adds life and zest to what is otherwise bland and boring. And it saves from corruption. When Our Lord said "Ye are the salt of the world" this is the heart of His message. Faithful disciples are like salt. We are to be used up. We are to provide the additive that brings out the flavor of Christ-centered living in others. Christ's grace is the salt in us. This grace both preserves us, and through us brings flavor and the riches of Christ to others. Saint Paul makes this connection very clear writing to the *Colossians*. "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man." (*4:6*) God's grace is the salt which seasons our conversations, makes them flavorful to others, *and* keeps the content of what we say from being corrupted. God's grace releases flavor *but not nonsense*.

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Many makers of stringed musical instruments will tell you the best ones have been played for years by virtuoso musicians. Several years ago when a violin made by Stradivarius was stolen in Milwaukee the newspapers told of the famous violinists who had owned and played the instrument. Perhaps the thief read the article, because the violin was returned with a note of apology! An old violin once played by Jascha Heifetz is better than a brand new one still in its case. And the creator of the new violin will tell you his instrument will sound better in 200 years. Organists will tell you the best pipe organs are the old ones which are *played every day*. Our highest destiny is to be played by Jesus. Not played, really, but *used*, like salt, *every day*. We are to be used towards ends which He alone envisions. We do not know that end, but we know it will come about through a process of His using us.

The grace of Christ imparted to you and me preserves us, and also brings the universal saving remedy of the Lord to others. And this is not something that will happen at a date yet to be determined! The whole weight of gospel evidence is that the Blessed Lord Jesus declares you and I are filled with grace *already*. Jesus said to His followers “Ye *are* the salt of the earth.” So we are to get on with it.