

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Sexagesima Sunday
February 16, 2020

In His Sermon on the Mount, Our Lord Jesus had an agenda. He put before us the vision of what we must be. His vision is not an option. In reading the Sermon we cannot help but notice Our Lord's assumption of *absolute authority*. Often the Sermon on the Mount is used by those who argue for a "humanitarian ethic" "Humanitarian ethic" is a euphemism for a generous amount of wiggle room devoid of religious obedience. Right now the press is full of the religious views of presidential candidates. That gives us many examples of wiggle room religion. But unless you take scissors to the Sermon on the Mount, and leave what you don't like on the cutting room floor, it is impossible to ignore the many times Jesus of Nazareth says: "It was said to them of old time...*but I say unto you.*" In the sermon Jesus claims to be the fountain of moral law. And the only One Who can do that is the Word of God. You and I know Jesus is The Word of God.

The focus in today's gospel passage is on that portion of The Sermon on the Mount in which Our Lord deals with two teachings of the old Mosaic Law. In both cases Jesus deepens and crafts these ideas until they reach His standard. The first of these teachings is about *revenge*. To its credit, the old law had taken a great step forward in the direction of restraint and proportion. The old Hebrew religion was light years ahead of the contemporary paganism which surrounded the chosen people. So if a man knocks out your tooth you do not knock out two of his! But fast forward to the Sermon on the Mount and Our Lord says getting punched in the mouth is the opportunity to show superiority over outrage and revenge. It is only *after* the instinct for revenge is subdued we are able to take any necessary steps to protect the moral order and prevent injustice. In the moral law *vengeance* is considered the tempered response to transgression, and is the opposite of emotional-reactive rage.

The second idea of the old law Our Lord considered in His sermon is the general *treatment of enemies*. Almighty God redeemed us because He treats us not as we are but as we are capable of becoming. And God Incarnate requires His followers to act as He did. In the Sermon on the Mount Christ said, "But I say to you not to resist evil, but if one strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other, and

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if a man will contend with thee in judgment and take away thy coat, let go of thy cloak also, and whosoever will force thee one mile, go with him the other two.” For anyone who cares to notice, this is what happened on Good Friday. The good and gracious Saviour was struck on the cheek; His clothes were taken from Him, and He was forced to carry His Cross to Calvary. No wonder Blessed Jesus is called “The Pioneer and Perfecter” of the Way we should go. (*Hebrews 12:2*) God Incarnate taught us *and then He showed us*.

So whenever in our unconverted hearts we are quick to retaliate on an injustice, let us think about the Lord of Glory slapped on the face in the high priest’s judgement hall. Let us think about naked Jesus praying for the soldiers gambling over the clothes His holy mother had made for Him. And when any one, friend or foe, makes unreasonable or tiresome demands on our time and energy, let us remember Our Lord with His Cross on the road to Calvary.

The Sermon on the Mount has a lofty vision of what we must be. But it might seem a little less remote and impossible if we connect it to Good Friday. Christ’s Sermon is like marching orders we have accepted, and then been equipped, to follow.