

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Ash Wednesday
February 26, 2020

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The arrival of Lent carries with it a summons. But it is not a dreaded summons, like jury duty! You and I are bidden to make the next forty days a journey of advance in the spiritual life. And there is great news the devil wants us to forget. We were created by Almighty God with a capacity for this advance. When we became the children of God by baptismal regeneration we began life with good equipment. You do not need me to tell you the devil does his best to make a mess of that equipment. But with our focus on Jesus Christ, we have no hope in the easy satisfaction with the way we are, with our lack of spiritual desire, and with our caring little for the love of God and hatred for the sins which separate us from Him. To embark upon the journey of Lent is to recognize that Almighty God made us in His image, and that He intends us to rise above the level of fallen human nature with its depressing indifference and lack of lasting joy.

In our Lenten journey we do not have to promise the moon, or expect to move mountains! The notion we must accomplish dramatic and heroic things is part of the devil's cheap bag of tricks. He seeks to discourage us and easily does so only when we forget the gospel Good News. Our Blessed Lord Jesus made a promise: "Every one that seeketh findeth." *Every* one! The least effort to keep Lent means a spiritual movement in the soul towards God. *Any* resolution motivated by the love of Christ in order to fight sin shows a soul already spiritually alive, and in which the Kingdom of Heaven has begun to grow.

Years ago a friend of mine produced a little pamphlet with a catchy title: "**Advance by Retreat.**" Sometimes in military planning a tactical retreat is good overall strategy. And this is true in the spiritual life as well. To battle some bad habit, which keeps a soul from Christ, stirs up the life of God in that very soul. It opens a soul to the power of Christ's victory over sin, and applies His victory to the circumstances of our individual lives. *The power of Christ's victory is endless.* There is no end to the advance that can be made in the soul that turns to God.

That endless advance will finally take us into the realm where sacraments and blessed ashes and other Lenten methods are no longer needed because we shall come to see the Lord face to face. We aren't ready for that just now. That is why in a few minutes you and I will have the sign of the Cross marked in ashes on our

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foreheads. But all the ingredients for victory in that journey are present now, so that for you and me this Lent, beginning today, February 26, 2020, will lead to a joyful eternal end. Almighty God never desires the death of a sinner, but that we turn from our sins and be saved. His desire is that we will be with Him forever. That's the gospel, and it's good news.