

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford at Evensong & Benediction  
On the First Sunday of Lent  
March 1, 2020

+

On the first day of Lent, Ash Wednesday we always hear in the Gospel at Mass Our Lord's instruction about the Three Notable Duties: Prayer, Fasting, and Almsgiving. During the year we hear His instructions on *prayer* and especially on the prayer He gave us, the *Our Father*. We also hear the Lord's teaching about *almsgiving*. The famous observation of the widow's mite includes the counsel "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." Sometimes we think that is the philosophy of our federal government! Then there is the other duty, the one about *fasting*.

Why have men fasted? Perhaps it was the first instance of a hunger strike: an attempt to gain favor, or pity, or the notice, of the Heavenly realm. And then fasting began to be an activity to show that prayers were offered in earnest.

You and I also have a need to show that behind our prayers there is a right motivation: to draw us, and those for whom we pray, closer to Jesus Christ our Lord. The Gospel is quite clear God gives Himself to those who desire Him. What is the evidence we desire Him?

Words alone do not do it, nor do feelings. The Old Testament prophets were the first to say *talk is cheap*: actions speak louder than words. The truth is that nothing but action can demonstrate seriousness in our desire for God.

And so we come to the discipline of Lent. We displease ourselves, abstaining from needless indulgences, not to make us miserable, but for God's sake. And we search out the weak points in our service to Him, resolving to attack the barriers which block the path to God. The path to God leads to holiness of life.

One year a penitent told me on Thursday after Ash Wednesday the Lenten rule freshly made was now in shambles *after just one day!* And my response was GOOD! If we make Lenten resolutions which cannot be broken we have aimed too low. And it means we have also forgotten the Lord told us to "*strive to enter by the narrow gate.*" We must be ready for the time we break our resolutions, with the fallback plan we renew them, *every day if necessary*. Remember that discouragement is part of the devil's bag of tricks!

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford at Evensong & Benediction  
On the First Sunday of Lent  
March 1, 2020

+

It is no fast if it is easy. We displease ourselves in Lent because Christ pleased not Himself, but lived for the Father. And we know His prayers were heard, prayers and His life, which obtained our salvation.