

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 17, 2020

+

One of the widely ignored facts about Christianity is that there is a *test* of our religion. The test was provided by Our Lord Jesus and it is heard in today's gospel passage. "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments." This proposition is true even in its converse. The Lord Himself gave us that converse a few lines later when He declared "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me."

To help us keep His commandments Christ promised the gift of His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not some kind of add-on. He is the Third Person of the Holy Trinity. That means He is our *divine* counselor, comforter, and advocate. Christian disciples need such a mentor! To follow a discipline is a form of learning by doing. We learn about God and truth by *doing* the teachings and *living* the commandments of Our Lord. As with any kind of learning, spiritual learning cannot occur outside the context of actual experience.

One hundred years ago the lighthouse keeper in Saugatuck, Michigan used to give rough and ready swimming lessons. He'd throw a boy into twenty feet of water off a pier and watch him carefully. Sure enough, the boy, probably in a panic, stayed on the top of the water. Then the instructor would tell the kid how to use his arms and legs to move around. This method would not be approved by the YMCA! But it proves the point. You can check out every book on swimming in the Boston Public Library and read them all. But sooner or later you have to get into the water. In the same way we cannot learn about Divine Truth without *doing* truth. When souls hear about Christ from people like you and me they begin doing what He says. He says to love one another, to forgive one another, and refrain from judging one another. When we begin doing those things *something happens*. Christian theology uses words such as "the inner working of the Holy Spirit" Who encourages and prompts the definite act of our will and nudges us in the direction of Jesus Christ. But before we learn the theological vocabulary and explanation we experience the *fact* behind it all. When we practice Christian virtues we come to know them as attributes of God. And by practicing the Christian virtues souls arrive at the joyous discovery of the God they are seeking.

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 17, 2020

+

All of this means the Holy Spirit is quite a teacher, mentor, and guide! He leads us to Our Lord Jesus Who shows us the Father. Christian theology tells us the Holy Spirit *proceeds* from the will of God. And *God's will is love*. In the Holy Spirit we especially perceive the patience and infinite love of the Divine Being.

That patience and infinite love is seen in *Genesis* Chapter Six. Chapter Six is a *long* way from the fall of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Fallen human nature had succumbed to total depravity. By Chapter Six God was regretting He had made man. And yet the Lord declared "My Spirit shall not abide in man forever." We are surprised the Holy Spirit had not vacated the whole sordid enterprise long since! The justice and holiness of God would have withdrawn from His fallen miserable creatures. But at this *very late stage* in the affairs of God and man, the Holy Spirit was still striving with man and longed to remain in the heart of His poor sinful creatures.

And that is where we come in! *The very same Counselor* is now announced by Our Lord as being sent to *us*. In His love, the Holy Spirit is willing, *and even glad*, to be with and dwell in the weakest and least lovable of souls. He is dwelling in our hearts even now, as the greatest gift of Our Lord Jesus. The Blessed Sacrament is not Christ's greatest gift, nor is His Blessed Mother, nor is His Church. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit makes it possible for us to recognize and appreciate these other gifts in the first place.

Strive for something stupendous! Strive to be absorbed by the Presence of the Holy Spirit, and glorify this wonderful God Who chooses to dwell in your body and spirit. Any move you ever make towards God, any move you ever make to reach out in love to a fellow traveler along the way, has been prompted by this Counselor, Who is promised to be with you forever, even the Spirit of Truth.