

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Second Sunday after Trinity  
June 21, 2020

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Our Lord Jesus counsels His followers, including us, in the ways of the spiritual life. He equips us to “walk by faith and not by sight.” He told us God is our Father, and because the Father’s love is *the perfection of love*, there is no point in worrying, “come what may.” We enjoy being reminded that God is our Father and that He loves us. It is the *last* part of Christ’s instruction, the “come what may” part, that is the tall order.

We know that of the Lord’s original closest followers, all but one died a violent death. At the heart of the Gospel there is the fact Christ Jesus did not exempt Himself from the torments of earthly life. We know that life for us just might include the same possibilities our Saviour endured: an innocent and violent death. You and I right now face the ugly specter of Covid-19, and for how long? So how is it possible for us not to fear?

When we look more closely at those original Twelve Apostles we recognize that each believed Jesus deeply and personally cared for him. This conviction led them courageously to take on all trials and tribulations “come what may.” Had they *not* been convinced they were in the Lord’s hands and protection they certainly would not have died for Him! In the ancient tradition you remember Saint Peter was in the midst of his escape when he turned back to Rome. Peter went back to face death on a cross precisely because of his newly-affirmed conviction He was being cared for by His Lord and Master. The decisive element in the “come what may” part of the Lord’s direction to us is our *connectedness to Christ*. Our belonging to Christ does not save us from possible misery and misfortune. But our connectedness to Christ makes all of it endurable.

Bishop Moberly once said prayer was not so much asking God for what we think we want. Prayer is practicing to think and speak in the presence of God, face to face. The value of a long-standing prayer life is that it brings us increasingly into harmony with the Divine Will. We will come into familiar terms with Our Heavenly Father. The Psalmist said, “I pour out my heart by myself.” That is the thing. Jesus assures us we have this freedom of access. In the memorable example in today’s gospel Jesus told us God cares for every hair of our heads. (I hope that does not mean some of you with more hair than me get more care!)

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But as we pray, we gain confidence in familiarity with God. We don't worry we may sometimes pray ignorantly. We even stop praying for specific results. We know by our friendship with God that today's defeat or emergency may be part of a wonderful victory of which we have no knowledge. We learn to trust God "come what may."

As she is in so many ways, Our Blessed Mother is the perfect example of this trust. For thirty years she lived in such holy familiarity with God Incarnate. We can only imagine the depth of her bond with her Son Who is also God Almighty. Very little of that relationship is known to us, but we have glimpses of it. One day at a wedding feast, Mary said to God: "they have no wine." Blessed Mary was simply stating the facts, content in perfect trust to make no actual petition.

Over the course of our lifetime of Christian discipleship, what changes is our own interior response to the things which happen to us. Fifty years ago Dr. Louis Mella, chief of surgery at Augustana Hospital in Chicago told me when he had to bring bad news to family members in the surgical waiting room, he began to notice "Christians grieve well." That was how he put it. And it was the beginning of his conversion to faith. The same things happen to us as to other people. The same things happen to us now as happened to us *before* our relationship to Christ began to grow stronger. But as it does become stronger we take all of life in a different way. Our relationship to Christ becomes the center around which everything else becomes relative. And as with the first disciples of Jesus, fear fades away.