

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Third Sunday after Trinity
June 28, 2020

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Our Lord told us part of His business was to set priorities right. And this just might divide parents from children. He told us He had come not to bring peace but a sword. These are startling thoughts. They are not among the Bible bedtime stories you read to children! We think of Jesus as Prince of Peace and a reconciler. Are we wrong?

It is important to remember Our Lord came to earth in “the fullness of time.” Which means it was *God’s* time, not that of *The New York Times*! God’s time coincided with Israel’s belief a peaceful reign of David’s royal line was about to commence. Many people thought the Messiah would install a wise king and serve as his advisor. The Jewish government would come out on top, at the expense of the hated Roman occupation.

The Gospels reveal something different. Our Lord Jesus spent considerable time teaching the Messiah was *not* a political figure. From the misconception, it was often accepted uncritically that Jesus would have approved of whatever form of government and social order prevailed and that His Church should do this too. But the Gospels show Christ primarily defended each person’s dignity, because each person had a relationship to his Creator. All other factors are relative to this basic fact.

Christ’s saying about the sword is in the context of His support of this dignity and worth of each individual. We think of a sword as a sign of violence. We live in a society of violence. We forget that a sword stands equally for *other* things: it is a sign of *protection*, and a sign of *justice*. It is also a sign of the ability to cut through nonsense and what we call humbug, and separate out and identify different elements. A sword is able to *discriminate*. Discrimination is seen as a pejorative word these days. But Christ’s sword is like the chisel a jeweler uses to split a valuable gem from its base rock. The Lord’s teaching is always in the direction of reconciliation and healing. But He showed that before unity can be achieved, clarity must emerge. Christ’s sword brings *spiritual clarity*.

Right now our nation is in sore need of spiritual clarity. For example, statues and memorial and names are tumbling down. But they all play a crucial role in

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education. Why is the statue there? What did he or she represent? What must be our response to emulate the good or redress the evil in our own day? In Europe, many of the former concentration camps have been carefully and deliberately maintained so the history is not forgotten. We learn lessons from statues and memorials so life can move on. Without those statues and names and memorials of the past, our life remains static. After his conversion, St Paul did not erase his previous life. Nor did Dr. Bernard Nathanson. They had chosen Jesus Christ as Lord. Right now, special interest groups in our country are choosing other special interests. They are doomed to fail. Why? Because the only special interest which never fails is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

When a person is converted to faith in Jesus Christ, he does not, as his first order of business, disengage himself from his family and friends! In extreme cases, where conflict exists, family loyalty may have to be set aside. But for the most part, after conversion to Christ, one of the consequences is often the deepening of the relationship with family. Both Saint Andrew and Saint Matthew brought their relatives and friends to Christ. It can happen that way with us as well. But whether it does or not, the sword of Christ brings the beginnings of spiritual discernment to us. This changes things for the better.

Our commitment to Christ does not mean a curtailment of commitment to others. The opposite is true. And it is the sword of Christ that makes this possible. The Catholic religion is working in us when Almighty God has gotten under our skin! That is another way of describing the spiritual clarity the sword brings. Once we know our first link is to Christ Jesus, it is then we see the sanctity of other souls, that they too are destined to have a place in the family of God.