

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Twelfth Sunday after Trinity  
August 30, 2020

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Some people see this moment described in today's gospel as St Peter going from star pupil to class dunce! There has been, to be sure, a vested interest on the part of anti-Catholics to portray Peter as a fool. But that stance reflects poorly on our Lord's Own judge of character. The Second Person of the Holy Trinity does not make use of a Myers-Briggs personality test to judge Simon Peter! It is closer to the mark to see in Peter a loving heart which could not fathom the idea of personal shame and suffering for His wonderful Lord and Master. Sure, Peter is impulsive. So he burst out in indignant repudiation of any such thing as a cross for Jesus. But certainly Peter was only expressing the thoughts of *all* the disciples.

So, when people reading today's gospel passage assume there are only two major players on the stage: Jesus and Peter, that perception is just fine with *the third major player*. Who is this third person the scene? Our Lord identifies him: *Satan*. He wasn't seen by anybody else. And that's just fine with the devil! He operates in the shadows in and around human souls. And *the devil needs to be there!* Simon Peter had just proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah. Holiness was breaking out. And the old snake-in-the-grass has a vested interest in preventing holiness from happening.

The declaration of Peter and the confrontation with Satan need to be understood by remembering the great standoff which had occurred for forty days in the wilderness. That was when Satan tempted the Lord in at least three ways. Afterward, according to St Luke's Gospel, the devil then left Jesus "until an opportune time." *Was that time now?* A pure and tender human love was coming from Peter for perhaps the first time. On behalf of all the disciples, Peter was begging Jesus to turn away from the path leading to the Cross. This moment may be the most acute temptation Our Lord Jesus ever felt! The Lord could and did resist Satan in the wilderness. In a one-on-one, the devil is no match for the Son of God. But here, weak human souls were involved, and they were just at the point of a spiritual breakthrough.

The narrative says Jesus "turned and spake to Peter." After turning, *and before speaking*, Jesus looked *straight through Peter* and saw the dim form standing behind the disciple. Only Jesus saw the devil. *We* do not see the devil. Neither did

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the twelve disciples. We can only imagine the shock on their faces at the vehemence of the Lord's rebuke. Peter had just expressed the true love each one of them felt for the Master. *Right here* we see how insidious and crafty evil can be. Peter's outburst was one of honest and heartfelt love. But it was about *Peter's* plan for Jesus and not *God's* plan for all humanity. Always good at strategy, the devil found a ready-made place to drive a wedge. And the Lord knew it.

Being a follower of Jesus Christ can tempt us into an expansive version of selfishness, cloaked in piety, when we try to draw Almighty God into what *we* think best for the world, the Church, and ourselves. That is why we have necessary role models set before our eyes for guidance. We rightly think of the Blessed Virgin Mary, who never pressed any temptation upon her son by using a mother's love. At Cana she only stated a fact: "They have no wine." And then said to the others "Do whatever He tells you." During the Passion, we do not see the Blessed Virgin going to Pontius Pilate begging for clemency for her Son! The Blessed Mother is the preeminent sign of the natural understanding of God's ways when there is perfect union of a sinless nature with the will of God.

We learn about Simon of Cyrene and Veronica in the devotions of *The Stations of the Cross*. With the Blessed Mother, they also did not resist the Cross but *consented* to it, for Jesus, and for themselves. Every one of us, who, in the course of life, ever bears any suffering in memory of the suffering Saviour, has cancelled some part of the great load of human sin, and helped the Lord carry His burden. Our Lord knew Simon Peter would learn to do this. So did St Paul. And by God's grace we will too. It is St John of the Cross who reminds us: "One who does not seek the Cross of Jesus is not seeking the glory of Christ."