

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Good Friday
April 2, 2021

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In the confessional I sometimes ask a penitent if he has a crucifix at home. The answer is invariably *yes*. I ask for a *crucifix*, not a cross. Apart from its spiritual value, a crucifix may be a real work of art. That is because of the quality of carving, and the craftsmanship in wood, stone, silver, gold, or paint.

In Passiontide, however, we *veil* crosses in churches, or remove them if possible. In the last two weeks of Lent we make an extra effort to place ourselves directly before the Tree of Beauty that was raised on Calvary. Unlike our crucifix at home, this cross is rough and unfinished wood. Fastened to it is the body of a living man. Great spikes have pierced this man's hands and feet. He is pinned to the wood like a butterfly in a display box! His body is bruised and gashed raw from brutal beatings. The pain and enormous strain on His spread arms has drained the blood from His head. Jesus on the Cross is not a beautiful work of art. But *valuable*? No expense has been spared anywhere to create beautiful churches and shrines and reliquaries to hold even a reputed sliver of that rough and unfinished cross.

The value is not because of the wood itself, but *the man hanging on the cross* Who makes all the difference, and forever. Who is He? The answer is the exciting part. He is God's Own Son become man. He is *perfect*. *Perfect* in holiness, and *perfect* in love. And how did He get nailed to a cross? Out of love for the entire human race. That love is not just for all of us, but for *each* of us, each who has had or ever will have human existence. And a part of the excitement is that although we have rebelled against Him, He yet calls us His friends.

On Good Friday we stand before the true Cross. The Body hanging there is not a work of art made of wood or stone or precious metal. The Figure is a living man. That man looks down at us and asks: "This I have done for thee; what doest thou for Me?" Your beautiful crucifix at home asks the same question. But perhaps all too often you do not hear it as you straighten your necktie or adjust your hat one more time in the nearby mirror and go out the door.

"This I have done for thee; what doest thou for Me?" The way we answer that question shows how we have responded to the man on the cross. Your crucifix at home represents the Divine Original. The cross we see by the front door at home is

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a reminder that the service of God is costly, and involves a death to sin. The cross reminds us in a sinful world we must be prepared that to serve God in any real degree is to attract scorn and hate. There may be mockery, unpopularity, ostracism, perhaps even physical harm laid upon your faithful Christian shoulders and heart. The man on the cross said “Because the world hated Me, it will hate you also.”

Good Friday does not seek to stir up an annual one-day contrived emotion. *The man on the cross is playing for keeps*. He asks that we place our whole lives in His hands. There can be no territory where the King does not rule. We often think no one has the right to ask us to do what hurts us or to give up something we wish to keep. We build a clever case for excluding God with the same mindset that tempts us in calculating our annual income tax return. But it won't wash. Even *before* Good Friday, excuses never worked. Our Creator has absolute rights over His creation.

You may not kneel very often before your crucifix at home. But you will do that here today. The hands and feet of the Crucified One bear the marks of nails. He demands sacrifice. But *Christ's demands are always made in love*. His gifts to us will be all out of proportion to the meager sacrifices we make in our response to Him. Nevertheless *you and I have decided to go with this man*.