

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Third Sunday after The Epiphany  
January 22, 2017

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In order to prepare for the daily battle against the “religion of what’s happening now” Bishop Michael Marshall used to make up a religion every morning in the shower. He took off the rough edges of Christ’s gospel as he rounded off the corners of a bar of soap! And then the new religion went down the drain with the rinse water!

If we were making up a religious faith we might begin with a leader who left us a manual of instructions. Failing that, we would have a group of first followers of the leader who collated various source materials and put them into one account of the master’s life. In the case of Christianity either of these things happened. Our Lord Jesus wrote no books. And although He *did* leave a group of twelve Apostles, they wrote (or their colleagues wrote) accounts of the saving act of God in Christ that often seemed independent of one another. They were also writing for people of faith who wanted to bring others to the Person they knew as Lord and Saviour. The only Evangelist who was bothered by any lack of coherent order in the records was Saint Luke. Twice Luke says his work was to put things in order.

That then is the reason there are differing accounts of the calling of the first Apostles. Does St Matthew’s account of the final call of Peter, Andrew, James, and John give us the whole story? Probably not. Internal evidence in the gospels suggest there were *successive* calls for Peter and Andrew (and perhaps many of the others as well.) Saint John’s Gospel tells us once previously Simon Peter and Andrew were summoned, when they were in the act of casting their net. Whatever that first call may have been, it was not until now that Jesus called the disciples into a close and constant attendance upon Him. We might even characterize that first call as a *wakeup* call. Jesus was saying *get ready*.

Okay. The point is: Christ brings souls *by degree* into fellowship with Him. That is true even when there is a sudden conversion. This week we have the Feast of the Conversion of St Paul on the Damascus road. There is a stained glass window in Nashville depicting St Paul with St Stephen. Hearing Stephen preach so powerfully must have been a wakeup call for Paul. Like many great men, Paul first opposed this awakening by redoubling his fury against Christianity. Our own conversions may have been less dramatic. But even so, most of us can look back and recognize

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the seed of conversion or vocation were being planted. We were being prepared for the day we would say *yes* to Jesus Christ. In a last effort to resist the claims of the Gospel Malcolm Muggeridge declared to Mother Teresa, “Come on, Reverend Mother, the Lord needs a few good people outside His Church.” To which the holy woman’s answer was, “No. He doesn’t.”

At a later time in His ministry we see Our Lord dealing very strictly and closely with three aspirants for discipleship. So there is no reason to assume Jesus was *more casual* in selecting the twelve Apostles. Hidden beneath today’s Gospel text there were practical discussions of what must happen. These men had families for which provision must be made. Some of them had a fishing business with assets and employees. You cannot responsibly walk away from these circumstances. Scripture records Our Lord rejecting would-be disciples for lesser things. And when all was ready, the go ahead had to be given by the Word of God Himself.

For us too there is the experience of repeated conversions and vocations to specific work. Each one calls us into a closer and more permanent discipleship to Our Lord. And it is a great encouragement and comfort to us in our weaknesses to ponder stories like the calling of the fishermen.

You remember that in *Genesis*, at the moment of creation, the Lord gave the Word. *And it was done*. In God Incarnate there is no lessening of this Divine attribute. God’s Word does what It says. Jesus once said “Lazarus, come forth” *and it was done*. The same power of God is in Christ’s words “*follow me*.” His words bring the sufficiency of His grace (which is what the Psalmist called the power to “*make willing*.” (Ps.110.3)

Christ Jesus never calls us to any task without giving the equipment to perform it. The Lord’s power to *make willing*, working in our very own practical everyday circumstances, is a force of unparalleled potency. It is sobering to know this divine grace and power can only be diminished or tarnished by our sinful condition and willfulness.