

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Second Sunday after the Epiphany
January 18, 2015

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What point marked the beginning of the Catholic Church? What would you choose as the starting point? A good choice might be the Day of Pentecost. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit guides and guards the Church and leads her into all truth. You would not be wrong voting for Pentecost!

Or, you might pick that moment on Good Friday when the soldier opened with a spear the side of the dead Christ. Saint John tells us from the side of Christ flowed blood and water, the fountain of the sacramental life of the Church. Would that get your vote? At what moment did the Catholic Church begin?

Let's also consider an incident in today's gospel. This has the moment when it says, "They followed Jesus." Who are "they?" Saint Andrew is identified. The other unnamed man is perhaps Saint John the Evangelist himself. John does not like to name himself in his own Gospel. He calls himself "the beloved disciple." That is a Biblical prototype of a *nom de plume*. Some of you might remember Winston Churchill calling himself "Former Naval Person" in his history of the Second World War. At any rate St Andrew and St John were the first in a long line of followers of Jesus Christ. It is a *long* line. The line includes you and me. A case may be made that *this* moment, when St Andrew and the beloved disciple followed Jesus marked the beginning of the Catholic Church.

Most of us became adult followers of Christ because of what someone else said or did. That experience goes all the way back to Andrew and John. They heard about Jesus from John the Baptist, the Lord's forerunner. Notice that Andrew and John were not yet directed to become disciples. When they asked where Jesus was staying the Lord did not tell them to fill out an application form! Jesus graciously replied, "Come and see."

Sometime a teacher opens his classroom discussion by posing a difficult question. It may be about diagramming a sentence or a problem in mathematics. And when none of the students can offer a solution, the teacher says, "Let's do it together." He would invite the class to "come and see." That is the way the Jewish rabbis used to teach. They would present some hard point of the Law, and when it appeared to their students there was no solution, the rabbi would share his own

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knowledge by first saying, “come and see.” That is the learning experience. It is far better than being given the answer or looking it up in the back of the book!

Of course the difference between that type of scenario and the Gospel good news is that we have no difficult problem to solve except our own sinful proclivities. “Come and see” is an invitation to spend time with Jesus and find in Him the very center of our lives.

Abiding with Jesus is more important than hearing about Him, even from someone as eminent as John the Baptist. And eminent he was! John had pointed to Jesus and said, “Behold the Lamb of God.” We still take John’s advice when we use those very words in the Mass just before communion. “Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him that taketh away the sins of the world.” John the Baptist had given correct instruction. But that was only enough to get Andrew and John interested in learning more. At this point they were still non-committal. Even when they asked where Jesus was staying, these two men still only called the Lord “*rabbi*”....teacher. It was *after* Andrew and John had stayed with Jesus that day that they raced to their respective brothers, Simon and James, and announced “we have found the Messiah....the Christ.”

The Kingdom of Heaven on earth began that day with these first two citizens. They came to believe Jesus is the Messiah, and then at the first opportunity went to bring other souls to Christ. So if you voted for today’s Gospel you are also right! For the beginning of the Catholic Church this is as good a starting place as any!

What happens *after* that is where the real adventure begins! After we know the Lord we will no longer choose what we will do for Him. Rather, our lives will rest in the good pleasure of the Lord and what, prompted by His Holy Spirit, He will do in us and through us.