

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany
February 1, 2015

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The Epiphany Season is so named because of the three great epiphanies or *showings* of Our Lord Jesus Christ: to the Magi, at His Baptism, and in the first miracle at Cana in Galilee. After that the season continues by recounting various incidents on the general theme of God's manifestation to a wondering and then believing people. The people began to understand the qualitative difference in Jesus from what they had known before. They said, "He taught as one who had *authority*, and not as the scribes."

Notice that as soon as Christ began to preach He began to work miracles. There is a reason for this. Besides alleviating the pain and suffering (both physical and spiritual) of souls in need, the miracles also served as confirmation of Christ's doctrine. His doctrine was to defeat Satan and cure sick souls. His miracles demonstrated what He taught. The people got the message. When Christ performed a miracle not only were they amazed but they also asked: "What new *doctrine* is this?" The people connected what Jesus did with what He said, *and they listened carefully*.

In today's Gospel passage the people *twice* came to the realization Jesus had *authority*. It is important to know what is meant, and what is *not* meant by this word **authority**. In the charter of the great commission at the conclusion of St. Matthew's Gospel the Lord gives authority to the Apostles. It is this apostolic authority of Christ that continues in the Catholic Church, which she has and exercises in doctrine and sacraments for the defeat of the devil and the cure of sick souls in our own day.

It is easy to see the word *author* as the root word in authority. The author of anything is its creator. We cheapen the word authority when we dilute *the connection to the author*. As an example, think of a maker of fine cabinets, one who is a real purist in his craft of making furniture. He even plants the seedlings for the types of trees whose grains of wood he will select for the various styles and ornamentation of the cabinets and tables he builds. He cuts the trees, planes the planks, makes those square pegs for the round holes we talked about at coffee hour last week, and builds the table to his own design. He finishes the table with hours

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of fine sanding and coats of varnish or lacquer. To the extent that the cabinetmaker has *participated in his own creative act* this man is an authority on tables.

Now consider another man who has never even walked in the woods let alone used a saw or planer¹ But this man has read everything in existence on the history of furniture. He can identify all styles, talk at length on the art of inlay and joinery and can tell you the origin of a cabinet down to the century, country, even the *county or town* and sometimes even the name of the cabinet maker! We say this man is an authority on furniture. But in point of fact he is not an authority but a scholar. *Authority*, truly speaking, *belongs to the author or originator of a thing*, not to those who know about it, however vast their knowledge. When Jesus taught and when He cured the sick, He amazed people who had heard the experts and scholars and professionals. What astonished the crowds was that Jesus “had *authority*, and not as the scribes.”

The Lord’s preaching astonished because His doctrine was not bolstered by assertions quoting prophets and scribes. Rather, Christ taught as one Who was *at one* with the mind of God and was commissioned to declare it. When He cured the sick Jesus did not resort to a drawn-out process of prayer and invocation. The Jewish exorcists did that. They invoked various intermediaries and charms to drive away evil spirits and demons. Jesus *commanded* evil without any appeal to a higher power. These miracles confirmed what the crowd suspected when it heard Christ preach, that He had some kind of direct and personal connection with the creative source of life. The suspicions of the crowd were right.

Jesus in the Gospels says to Philip, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father.” And in St. Mark’s Gospel we are told to take the Son as being the same as the Father. The links in the chain between this Jesus walking the streets of Capernaum and the Creator and Source of Life are too tight and close for us to ever find a separation between them. Jesus has authority. He is not a scholar who knows the ways of God. *He is God.*

So when Our Lord Jesus, in His deliberate provisioning for the Church, says, “As the Father has sent Me, even so send I you,” He is conferring *authority* on the

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Apostles. When they preach or baptize or offer the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass it is Christ present, not as spectator, or because we think of Him more intensely at such moments, but Who Himself is the initiator, the high priest, preaching and baptizing and offering Himself.

In their own simple but profound way the people of Galilee who saw and heard Jesus came to the right conclusion. They said He is “a teacher come from God.” Later on we would learn to call Him more: *Christ, Redeemer* and *Saviour*, because being One with the Father, the author of life, Jesus possesses the *authority* to release us from our sins.