

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Fifth Sunday after The Epiphany
February 8, 2015

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In the Gospels Our Lord Jesus is seen going about His business. What is that business? God came to live with us so He could die for us. So when the Lord's friends suggested He should stay in one place and rest upon His laurels, the answer was certain. Jesus refused. Way back in *The Book of Judges* it was written, "The inhabitants of the villages in Israel shall rehearse the righteous acts of the Lord." Jesus was determined to go to those villages.

Even in the early days of His ministry in Galilee, however, Our Lord was planning in His mind His first mission to Jerusalem. After His baptism in the Jordan, Our Lord had been tempted in the wilderness. (That incident is always our Gospel at Mass on the First Sunday in Lent.) But you remember at the time of the temptation Jesus refused to present Himself in the Temple by any display of supernatural power. That power would have *forced* the allegiance of the nation to Jesus. That was not God's way. Eventually the people would have to decide for or against the Lord and Jesus went to work to bring the people to the point of making that decision.

The Lord built up a following. Early on He gave His inner circle of disciples a mysterious and beautiful sign of the character of His Gospel. It was the first miracle at the wedding in Cana of Galilee, where Jesus turned water into wine. This was no crowd-stunning performance. The Cana miracle was very much *unnoticed*. Only the steward (and perhaps Our Lady) had some idea of just what had happened. That miracle set the tone for Our Lord's ministry.

It has been said Christian faith is "caught not taught." Something is at work inside us that convinces us Jesus is Son of God. We learn to recognize this "something" is *Someone*. It is the Holy Ghost. At one point Christ declared to Simon Peter, "Flesh and blood has not revealed [My divinity] to you." It was not miracles or teaching *per se* but *the inner workings of God Himself* that erupted in Peter's declaration, "Thou art the Son of the Living God."

All the proofs and arguments may be laid out. But it is always the Holy Ghost Who provides the interior way of knowing. He is the One Who "connects the dots." I have a favorite story about this. It is of a Chicago surgeon who became a Christian

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after observing, over many years, when he had to bring bad news from his surgery to the waiting room, that Christians took the news better. Dr. Louis Mella told me at lunch one day that “*Christians grieve well.*” That observation led him to Christ. For this surgeon, up to that point nothing could have been less likely to succeed than a well-intentioned layout of Christ’s miracles or Christian doctrine. But people weeping quietly in a hospital waiting room did it for Dr. Mella. There is nothing more effective than the example of a life lived in sincere conformity to Christ’s teaching. This is what Saint Francis meant when he said, “Preach the Gospel, use words if necessary.”

Another Gospel you will hear in Lent is about the Samaritan woman at the well. After her conversation with the Lord she went off and told the townspeople about Jesus. She must have been an effective teacher, for we are told they all came out with her. But after having been with Jesus they told her, “We no longer believe because of you but because we have seen for ourselves.” *Telling only goes so far.*

In our Gospel at Mass today the Lord Jesus is laying the groundwork for what will be revealed later. Those who have eyes to see and ears to hear will come to faith. Jesus is seen taking care of thousands of souls to whom it was only revealed that He was a prophet. He was not giving them an “I am God: take it or leave it” proposition. They weren’t ready for that.

Giving witness to how we know the faith or came to it can encourage others to go through the motions of Christian discipline and gradually come to an inner appreciation of the Christian life. But our faith cannot convince someone else who has not already become receptive to this kind of knowing. That is what is meant when people say Christian faith is “caught not taught.” It is the Holy Ghost Who “connects the dots.” Saint Paul put it this way: “I planted, Apollos watered, but *God giveth the increase.*”