

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Palm Sunday
March 20, 2016

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The written account of the story of Our Lord's three-year ministry is not a daily diary in minute detail. In fact the original writings were clusters of teachings and collections of accounts of healings and other miracles. Saint Luke, who was a later convert, found the various collections of stories a mess. And Luke tells us both at the opening of his gospel and *The Acts of the Apostles* that he had tried to put things in coherent order. The other evangelists, without telling us about their efforts, did the same. They put things in order.

But when those early collections assembled the events of Holy Week there was a noticeable difference. This was only *one week* in a three year ministry and one week in a life of thirty-three years. But in contrast to the rest of what later became the Gospels, (where there are gaps in the narrative and what may be a few repetitions,) in Holy Week the events are carefully measured out, day by day, and later in the week, hour by hour. On Good Friday it is almost *minute by minute*. Clearly something important is going on! The Gospel story goes into countdown mode. It is cockcrow by cockcrow. And that is because Holy Week contained the great saving events of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Christianity without Holy Week is a philosophy. The Cross makes our discipleship a *religion*. The Cross reveals the Glory of God in His Beloved Son. The action in this week of God-in-the-flesh is not for our analysis so much as for our reverence, our thanksgiving, and our worship.

"Behold the wood of the Cross, whereon hung the Saviour of the world. O come ye, let us worship." You will hear those words at the Good Friday Liturgy just prior to the ancient liturgical act of veneration of the Cross. It is flat-out wrong to say those words and such things about the execution of an innocent man, no matter how great he may have been. Holy Week is different! It is *Holy*. By Divine appointment these events make present the death of God for us. That is why we do indeed approach with fear and trembling, with reverence and worship.

Father Stravinskis recalls a fundamentalist minister once observing Catholic Mass and saying, "If I believed about the Eucharist what you Catholics say you believe

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or are supposed to believe, I would have to come up the center aisle to receive crawling on my belly.”

During the trial of Our Lord, when the Jewish high priest Joseph Caiaphas rent his garments and accused Christ of blasphemy, this was not a colorful piece of pre-Yiddish theatre! Caiaphas was a smart man. He knew very well the charges against Jesus were trumped up. He knew the crowd was confused and its witnesses could not agree. With his patience worn out, the high priest asked Jesus directly what He claimed to be. If the Lord had answered He was a prophet or a king descended from David, or a reformer with a national following, or even just a street organizer and disturber of the public peace, none of that would cause Caiaphas to tear his clothing. But Jesus does not do that. When Caiaphas asked if Jesus were the Christ the Son of God the Lord answered, “I AM.” The same divine utterance that once thundered down Mt Sinai now reverberated in the judgment hall. No man dared to utter the Divine Name. In the scriptures when the Jews got to the place where the Divine Name would be given they left the space blank. But amidst the resulting horror and cries of blasphemy Jesus stood there patiently. There was no backpedaling. There was no effort to parse the wording. There was no attempt to craft a carefully-nuanced statement for the Jerusalem press corps. It was left for modern deconstructionists to write books telling us what Jesus really meant.

Sorry Garry Wills and Dan Brown and your cohorts. You may be makings lots of money off gullible people. But Joseph Caiaphas was there! And Caiaphas understood that he must judge or misjudge Jesus by His Own definition. Christ gave the challenge. He is God rejected by His Own people. Eternal Justice was being brought to the bar of a human court. The Author of Life was going to die on a Cross.

The Catholic conviction also does not nuance the *aftermath* of this confrontation. It is the Catholic assertion that this Man standing before Caiaphas and dying on a Cross now sits in judgment upon us who have made ourselves His judges. This man who in Holy Week was a prisoner bound with ropes and chains, tells us there will be two classes of judged souls: those who confessed Him, and those who

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denied Him. You and I will ultimately come down into one or other of those categories. This Man of Sorrows will point us to one of two final destinies.

In Holy Week the liturgy, in its ancient and striking way, bids to walk with Jesus and His Cross. And then we are to spend our lives thereafter preaching Christ and Him crucified. For notice that there was one point of agreement between Christian believers and the Lord's accusers. They had cried out, "His Blood be upon us and upon our children." And that is *exactly* where we want It. We want His Blood upon us and upon our children. The Blood of Christ will save us from our sins.