

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford at Evensong & Benediction  
The Second Sunday of Easter  
April 3, 2016  
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It is a relatively modern phenomenon that people attempt to divorce Christian faith and practice from the institution of the Church. A cultural anthropologist could suggest how recently such a line of thinking developed. But the reasons almost always boil down to a soul running afoul of the teachings of Christ faithfully proclaimed by His Church. To get rid of the message you shoot the messenger! The veteran character actress Margaret Whiting made a living in her last years as spokesperson for the *Haines* underwear company. “It doesn’t say *Haines* until *I* say it says *Haines*.” That slogan could be the mantra for all those who disparage and deprecate the Catholic Church. “It doesn’t say church until *I* say it says church.” Now I know that when at supper this evening someone asks about the sermon you will say “Father Bradford preached about underwear!”

When someone says he can worship God just as well driving in the mountains on a beautiful Sunday morning you and I are reminded of the old rejoinder: the only time God is mentioned in the mountains is when the car gets a flat tire! And then the Name of the Lord is not used in a very reverent way at all! All right, so much with those who think they can be Christian without the Church. They have in point of fact made up a new religion.

One of the evident results of the Easter Day appearances of the Risen Lord Jesus Christ is that His disciples were reconstituted as a *nucleus of believers*. The Risen Lord changed them instantly from a sorry group of ex-followers (intent on sneaking out of Jerusalem at night) into a community with an organic life of its own. In that Upper Room these men, and those who quickly joined them, recognized they shared a common salvation. Now that they received the Good News they were also commissioned to proclaim it to the end of the earth.

Now it is true there was a personal and individual dimension to all this. Each person in that Upper Room not only believed Jesus Christ is risen from the dead, but he also now trusted his life to the Lord as personal Savior. And yet Christian salvation from the very beginning of its proclamation is an event of *the community of faith*. On Easter Day morning, Mary Magdalene was told “*Go and tell Peter*” the good news. In the Upper Room that evening the Risen Lord was known to the

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disciples *in community*. Indeed the New Testament records are quite clear. Both the experience of salvation and the proclamation of it were something the disciples shared together.

Those Easter events reveal the Church right from the get go. And when at Pentecost, fifty days into Christian history, the first Christian gospel was preached, the sermon was clearly being offered by an identifiable community of believers to those in the crowd. *The Acts of the Apostles* is quite clear. A group of Christian believers was seeking to share with a wider circle a faith it already possessed as its common inheritance. In response to Peter's preaching at Pentecost, when the crowd asked, "Men and brethren what shall we do?" they were addressing a cohesive community of faith. And when a reply was given, it was not advice to wing it, or go into the mountains on Sunday morning and worship God as you like. No. The answer was "*repent and be baptized.*" To receive the salvation on offer by Christ was from the very beginning to accept the *sacramental* invitation into the Church that already exists.

If there is salvation outside the Church, that is Christ's business. But we must affirm what is already clear in the Easter records and the earliest proclamation of the New Testament, that the Risen Lord Jesus did not leave us a book, or a road map to enjoy a mountain drive. He left us His Church.