

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon peached by Father Bradford on Good Friday
April 14, 2017

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There is a very special moment on the evening of Easter Day. It is when the Risen Lord Jesus showed ten of the Apostles His hands and His side. Eight days later this same opportunity was given to St Thomas. Thomas was actually invited not only to see the print of the nails but thrust his hand into the Lord's side. Happily Thomas did not take up the gracious invitation! Instead Thomas declared "My Lord and my God."

That moment referred back to a strange and brief event which occurred immediately after Jesus had died. The soldiers pierced the side of the Lord's body and two jet streams came forth: one of blood and the other of water. In the Good Friday Passion we hear about that moment. It is easy to pass over it as a little oddity, and superfluous, when so much is going on. But Saint John raised one of his famous red flags right here. He insists we take notice. St John says, "He that saw it bare record, and his record is true, and he knoweth that he saith truth, that ye might believe." That is *remarkably intense emphasis*. We are not to miss the significance of this event.

St. John waved the flag so we will notice the piercing of the Lord's body. In the Upper Room on Easter Day night the Lord put emphasis on His pierced side. And He said more about it on a previous occasion, which St John describes in Chapter Seven of his gospel. The Lord says: "If anyone thirst, let him come to Me, and let him drink who believes in Me. As Scripture says, from within him shall flow rivers of living water." And then the evangelist interrupts the Lord's teaching with another of his red flags! St John comments that by water Jesus was referring to the Holy Spirit "which those who believed in Jesus were to receive. For as yet, there was no release of the Spirit since Jesus had not been glorified."

We know St Luke records the great gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, fifty days after Easter. But St John is quite clear the Risen Christ gave the Holy Spirit to the disciples in the Upper Room on Easter Day evening. On Good Friday Jesus had cried "It is finished" bowed His head, and gave up the Ghost." St John wants us to know this "giving up the ghost" does not mean the Incarnate Lord's own human spirit. We are to understand the flowing of water from the side of the dead Christ is the giving of the Holy Spirit Who is the source of faith. Unlike John the Baptist,

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whose rite was a baptism of water only and did not convey the Holy Spirit, the death of Christ, involving water and blood, issued forth the Holy Spirit upon the Church. And there was a quorum present! The Church was present at the foot of the Cross in the presence of the Blessed Mother and the Beloved Disciple.

Devotion to the Pierced Side of Christ is not to be lost by Catholics. The Jews had given the accusation: “His Blood be upon us and upon our children.” And that is *exactly* where we want it: the Precious blood on us and on our children. Here is a new type of dead man. The soldier’s spear was meant to make sure this man was truly dead. And so he was. But in this very pronouncement of death was the beginning of life. For from this dead man flowed living water that will be a source of life for all who believe in Him. As with the Jews in Pilate’s courtyard, all of this was too much for many of the Protestant reformers. They looked at old stained glass windows and sculpture scenes of the Crucifixion and noticed the ladders leaning up against the Cross during the deposition of the dead body. And so they developed the superstition of not walking under ladders in fear something would drop on them from above. The advice of Holy Mother Church: stick with Saint John!

Finally, the evangelist records “They shall look on Him Whom they pierced.” They gazed *in amazement* that the dead Christ was still giving, still providing for His followers. And the proof of the release of the Holy Spirit is in the declaration of the Centurion. “Truly this man was the Son of God.”

How awful is sinfulness, and how unloving and ungrateful is the smallest act of wrong! But truth be known, (and Good Friday is the ultimate day for the revealing of truth) this man laid down His life for me who was His enemy. And you can say that too. And so we come with tears of remorse and penitence, and in love. We desire so much to show Him sorrow for our sins and the resolve to return our lives to Him. Do not let tomorrow, or the next day, or the day after that, ever complicate your life to lessen that resolve. *Place yourself under that ladder!* Stand under the pierced side of the dead Christ, that all the benefits of His death, the issuing forth of the Holy Spirit and the sacramental life of Christ’s Church, may flow into your heart and fill it with the fullness of His love.

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