

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Holy Saturday
April 15, 2017

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Saint Joseph of Arimathea is the Bible's best example that before we die it is never too late to mend a bad matter.

Joseph had been a secret disciple of Our Lord, and we are told why. It was secret "for fear of the Jews." So now the Lord was dead, it would have been natural and understandable for Joseph to keep his allegiance suppressed. No one need ever know.

There were all sorts of practical reasons for keeping quiet. And as we all know, the devil himself has a whole bag of practical reasons! If Joseph touched the body of a dead man he would be ceremonially unclean for Passover. And his failure to take part in Passover would open Joseph to ridicule and scorn. Besides all that, the clock was ticking! There were only a few hours left on Good Friday before the festival began. It was not sufficient time to accomplish much. No reasonable man would have faulted Joseph of Arimathea for doing nothing. And as a result, we would never even know his name.

But Scripture tells us Joseph "having *dared*, went in unto Pilate and craved the body of Jesus." And by so doing, two good things happened. First, Joseph galvanized into action another timid and secret disciple named Nicodemus. And then secondly, by their generous service to the dead Christ, Joseph and Nicodemus unintentionally provided one of the strongest proofs of the Resurrection. Honoring the memory of a man they admired, the two men bound Our Lord's body in linen cloth, and folded in the embalming spices, a generous amount "about a 100 pounds weight." In so doing, they made it impossible for the body to move except, of course, in a supernatural way. And anyone quickly stealing the body would have taken it as it was, wrapped and weighted in the burial cloth. The next day, when St John saw the collapsed empty linen shroud, Scripture says, "he saw, and believed."

Let the experience of Joseph of Arimathea teach us to make the most of a spiritual crisis or even a disaster. For Joseph and Nicodemus that is what Good Friday seemed to be. But remember also that when we turn away from our failures and to the Lord, we must bring our best. Joseph and Nicodemus did that. We must bring our equivalents of the new tomb hewn out of solid rock for Joseph's own use, and

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the costly burial spices brought by Nicodemus. We are to provide Blessed Jesus with a heart cleansed by our penitence and thereby made ready for Him, and our souls fragrancd by our cultivation of the Christian virtues.