

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Second Sunday of Easter  
April 23, 2017

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Down the street from St Theresa's Church is the Theodore Parker Unitarian Church. It always has a catchy little phrase posted on the street-front marquee. One June the sentiment was: "Have a nice summer. See you in the fall." And I suppose if you can find God by hugging a tree you don't need the Theodore Parker Church! If Holy Mother Church were interested in catchy titles today's gospel could be called "The Upper Room: the Sequel." If you were making up a religion you would have *perfect attendance* among the Apostles on Easter Day evening. If you can die on a Cross on Friday and be conversing and dining with your friends on Sunday it is certainly not beyond your capacity to have everybody present when you want them! But real life is not always neat and tidy. And in the affairs of Almighty God nothing happens by chance.

The Risen Lord once solemnly told His followers God was like a Good Shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine sheep who are safe in order to seek the one which is lost. *And here He is*, returning one week later for the one Apostle who had not seen His great Risen Friend. The incident rings true as the consistent character trait of the Lord Jesus. His concern and love for all never diminishes His care for each.

"The Upper Room: the Sequel" also adds to our estimation of the apostolic witness. We know Our Lord sent His apostles out with power to witness to all that God has done in Christ. That apostolic witness continues. Saint Paul says the Church is "built upon the foundation of the twelve apostles, Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone." That being so, we can only imagine what a *difficult time* St Thomas had whenever he did show up! Thomas faced a gauntlet of earnestness with which his colleagues in the Upper Room urged upon him the Gospel good news that Christ is Risen. The Lord had given these men the power of the Holy Spirit to do this very thing. But St Thomas had been called to be an apostle, and so his testimony must not be on hearsay but, like theirs, as an eyewitness of the Resurrection.

That apostolic witness is *essential* to the life of Christ's Church. It has been effective in reaching hearts and souls throughout history. Some of these apostles were responsible for the creation of whole national churches. Yet that evangelization power could not work in this one Apostle because he had not had

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the decisive eyewitness experience of the Risen Lord. We know that Redemption once upon a time awaited the simple word “yes” from a young Jewish girl named Mary. St Thomas is like that. There is something of the mystery of God’s condescension, and loving kindness, and involvement in human affairs, that not only made the Lord Jesus come back for Thomas but also *made the Gospel proclamation wait for Thomas*.

You know the drill when you get a replacement credit card. The old one has expired and so they send a new one. To activate it you call a toll-free number and punch in some code. It just may be that the effective activation of the apostolic preaching awaited bringing the last Apostle to Easter faith. This isn’t to focus on Thomas but on the Lord, and it reveals a bit of the mystery of Christ’s work in His Church. When we no longer look through a glass darkly we shall realize that this involvement of Christ in His Church was closer and more intimate than we could ever imagine.

For his part, Thomas was anything but playing hard to get! He *loved* the Lord Jesus. Thomas is on record as having been willing to die with or for Jesus. Because of that great loyalty there was too much at stake. The Blessed Lord meant so much to Thomas he was afraid the Resurrection could not be so. That kind of honest doubt, in the absence of evidence, is the work of a keen mind. And a keen mind is a gift from Almighty God. Had Thomas chosen to doubt until he won the Massachusetts lottery, or unless we get 25 inches of snow before sundown today, the Lord would not have back come back for him. St Thomas did indeed set conditions. But he was asking for *contact with His Lord*. Thomas wanted Jesus and only Jesus. And the Lord, of course, knew that. Isn’t it strange and wonderful that this attitude of heart is very close to the blessedness Christ declared was the condition of “those who have not seen and yet believe.” Which is where *we* come in!

The Apostles understood very little of the power of their Risen Lord. And it must have been a joyful surprise, an ongoing strength, and immense satisfaction for the Apostles that, yes indeed, when they told the story of the Lord, men and women would be ready to believe because of their testimony. This apostolic ingredient was

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not of their making, but it would continue from their day right down to our very own. For Christ's Church is the living organism of the Risen Lord. *Alleluia.*