

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Third Sunday of Easter  
April 30, 2017

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Three weeks into the Church's observance of Easter and the Sunday gospels are still giving us what may be described as "initiatory experiences." Today it is the account of two disciples on the road to Emmaus. In sermons on Lady Day I often remark on how the great masters of fine art have painted every verse, every instant, of the Annunciation story. Each moment in the incident is to savor and ponder. That is no less true with Easter.

On Easter Day morning Peter and John made something of the strange arrangement of discarded grave clothes in the empty tomb. For St John this sight produced awareness that Christ is risen, even though he had not yet seen the Risen Lord. Last Sunday we had the Gospel account of the disciples in the Upper Room. Christ appeared for the first time to all of them together. He breathed on them His Holy Spirit, and invited them to see and touch the marks of the crucifixion. In today's Gospel incident (which actually may have occurred *before* the meeting in the Upper Room) the breakthrough initiatory experience of the Risen Christ is in the breaking of bread.

No matter the order of these events, they are all first experiences of the resurrection. Even though these accounts were written some years later, the freshness of discovery is still apparent. And this freshness of discovery is conveyed *centuries later* to us as well. In all three appearances, the gentleness and solicitude of Our Blessed Lord Jesus comes through. In three different ways on that first Easter Day Jesus did not appear as some kind of wonder man. He is remembered as caring for His flock, that He should lose none of them.

No one in that flock of Christ was predisposed to faith. Peter and John were thinking of nothing more than a grave robbery and what to do about it. The apostles in the Upper Room were sifting confusing stories and planning their exit strategy from Jerusalem. The two disciples on the road to Emmaus were ahead of the apostles! These people were beyond planning anything. They were actually in the act of walking to their home in Emmaus, seven miles outside Jerusalem. They were voting with their feet!

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So here again is the Blessed Risen Lord Jesus, ever so gently going after two hurt souls trying to get away from a sad memory. They have turned their back on shattered dreams, set out for home, and intending to live as best they can without faith. And it is *right there* that Jesus drew near. Yes, He is going to spend considerable time with the Apostolic College. That is as it must be. The Apostles are crucial to the ongoing life of the Church. Christ intends His Church have an *apostolic* witness. But these two people on the road to Emmaus are small fry! They are ordinary people. They are like the ones you saw a dozen years ago camping in the streets of Rome before the funeral of Pope St John Paul. Or the ones you saw this week attending Mass in Cairo celebrated by Pope Francis, ordinary people risking their safety and wondering about any aftermath of recrimination or vandalism in a world hostile to Christian faith.

Yes the Church will have apostolic witness. But every one of these ordinary people has his or her own story about the Risen Lord. We know what eventually happened at Emmaus. Cleopas and his companion, perhaps his wife, finally recognized the Lord. And the same means for knowing Jesus are available to you and me. The Scriptures and the Blessed Sacrament, and *all* sacraments, and the hearts of faithful people, are given to us as integral parts of the ministry of Christ the Good Shepherd Who in His teaching and pastoral office is the minister and guardian and presence of Truth in every age.

Throughout the world libraries devoted to antiquity contain shelves of dusty archives filled with the accounts of wonderful men who began ethical movements. Then they died and that was the end of them and their movements. But when the old story is made new, people are having a Biblical experience. And it can happen in the streets of Rome or in Cairo as it once did on the road to Emmaus. For when we first meet Cleopas and his companion they are looking sad and downcast in the bright daylight on the road. They want only to get to their residence before darkness sets in. But when we leave them that night, they are stumbling across the fields by the light of the Paschal full moon, full of faith and joy, heading for Jerusalem to share the good news. Their dear friend and master Jesus is not dead. He is a Living Lord. *Alleluia!*