

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Second Sunday after The Epiphany  
January 14, 2018

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I want to begin my sermon today with a question. If you had to pick the place in the New Testament marking the beginning of the Catholic Church, what would get your vote? Now this is a *rhetorical* question and not the beginning of a dialogue sermon! When did the Church begin? You might vote for Pentecost, the day sometimes called “the birthday of the Church” because of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to guide and guard the Church and lead her into all truth. You would not be wrong voting for Pentecost.

But you might also pick another event. Some people pass it by but it is a moment when Saint John’s Gospel comes to a full stop. It is a good idea that when St John stops, we should too! You remember on Good Friday the soldier opened the side of the dead Christ with a spear to make sure He was dead on the Cross. St John tells us from the side of Christ flowed blood and water, the fountain of the sacramental life of the Church. A strong case can be made for saying *this* moment is where the Catholic Church began.

But how about considering today’s gospel? Here is the moment we are told “they followed Jesus.” Who are “they”? Saint Andrew is identified. And the other man is perhaps Saint John himself, who does not name himself in his own gospel account. He calls himself “the beloved disciple.” That is the Biblical prototype of a *nom de plume*, a literary device used by many authors. Some of you may remember reading Winston Churchill’s *History of the Second World War*. In dispatches Churchill always called himself “Former Naval Person.” At any rate, these two men, Andrew and John, were the first in a long line of followers of Jesus Christ. It is a *long* line because it includes you and me. And so a case may be made for *this* moment to mark the beginning of the Catholic Church.

Most of us became adult followers of Christ in the first instance because of what we heard someone else say. That experience goes all the way back to Andrew and John. They heard about Jesus from John the Baptist, the Lord’s forerunner. But notice Andrew and John were not yet directed to become disciples. When they asked where Jesus was staying He did not tell them to fill out an application form! The Lord graciously replied, “Come and see.”

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Do you remember when a teacher opened his classroom discussion by posing a difficult question? It was perhaps about diagramming a sentence or a problem in mathematics. And when none of the students could offer a solution the teacher said “let’s do it together.” He would invite the class to participate. “Come and see.” That was the way Jewish rabbis used to teach. They would present some hard point of the Law and when it appeared to their students there was no solution, the rabbi would kindly share his own knowledge to help them discover the way forward. He would say “Come and see.” But the difference between that type of scenario and the Gospel good news is that we have no difficult problem to solve! “Come and see” is an invitation to spend time with the Great Physician of souls and find in Him the very center of our lives

It is that *abiding with Jesus* that is more important than hearing about Him, even from someone as eminent as John the Baptist. John had pointed to Jesus and said, “Behold the Lamb of God.” We use those very words in the Mass just before communion. “Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him that taketh away the sins of the world.” John the Baptist had given correct instruction. But that was only enough to get Andrew and John interested in learning more. At this point they were still non-committal. Even when they asked where Jesus was staying they only called Him “*rabbi*”... teacher. But then they spent the day with Him, and what a wonderful day it must have been! For after Andrew and John had stayed with Jesus that day they raced to their respective brothers, Simon and James, and announced “we have found the Messiah...the Christ.” Wouldn’t you like to have been a fly on the wall or a mouse in the corner of that room to hear the conversation! There’s a setting for Peter Kreeft’s next book!

The Kingdom of Heaven on earth began that day with these first two citizens coming to believe Jesus is the Messiah. Then at the first opportunity they went to bring other souls to Christ. So if you voted for today’s gospel incident you are also right! For the Catholic Church, this is as good a starting place as any!

What happens after that? Well, after that the *real* adventure begins! After we know the Lord we no longer choose what we will do for Him. Rather, from now on we spend our lives conforming to the sovereign and good pleasure of Our gracious

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Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.