

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Third Sunday of Easter
April 15, 2018

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When the Sisters of Saint Joseph were still operating the St Theresa School, one morning Sister Monice McManus stopped me in the school hallway to comment on my sermon at the early Mass. She had been life-professed for sixty years but had heard new things in a passage of scripture she had read all her life. I laughed and said although I could not match her numbers, I had been preaching on that text for thirty years and at Mass had said things about it I had never even thought of in all those years! Isn't that the way with the Holy Scriptures? Bishop Stanley Atkins used to say we should chew on the scriptures as a dog chews on a bone. When we think there is no nourishment left on an old bone the dog continues to chew on it and find more sustenance.

Today's gospel at Mass is the account of what happened after the two disciples at Emmaus had seen the Risen Christ and returned to Jerusalem in the light of the Paschal full moon. So many things were happening in that Upper Room in Jerusalem. Wouldn't you ever like to have been a fly on the wall! We more often remember St John's description of what happened there, and especially "one week later" when St Thomas was present.

But today we have St Luke's account of Easter day night. When the two disciples returned from Emmaus with the exciting news of the appearance to them of the Risen Lord, it was likely forgotten that along the way to Emmaus the yet-unidentified Jesus had conducted Bible study. The two disciples had been fascinated by the Lord's exposition and refused to let Him continue down the road. That was because, as they recalled later, "He had interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning Himself."

Back in the Jerusalem Upper Room these two disciples and the apostles were having a debriefing session. Then suddenly all speculation was over! The Risen Lord Jesus joined them. We have the impression *how* this happened was not a particular matter of interest to either St Luke or St John. But both evangelists recall Jesus assured His followers that far from being the disembodied spirit of their Master Whose corpse was now decomposing in a grave, what they all saw and heard was a body fully capable of doing what living men do. The apostles were left

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convinced this particular body was the very one Joseph of Arimathaea had taken down from the Cross and laid in the tomb.

Having established in His followers the Resurrection was no delusion or hallucination but a fact, the Lord embarked once again on a study of the scriptures. These foretold all that had happened. The gospel puts it this way. “He opened their mind that they might understand the Scriptures.” Jesus loosened the selective memory that had focused on the promise of the glories of the Messiah but ignored the predictions of His sufferings. The Risen Lord had done this same thing on the road to Emmaus. He helped the disciples understand things they had known all their lives. Again, isn’t that the way with the Holy Scriptures? That was the very experience Sister Monice and I had had at an early Mass one day. We discovered things in the sacred story we had known all our lives.

In all the joy of discovery in the Easter gospels, remember Bible study was one of the first things the Risen Lord did. And He did it not once but *twice*. By it He sanctioned the principle of inquiry into the foundations of our religious belief. When the Lord said to Thomas “Blessed are they who have not seen and yet believe” this was not a rebuke to those who require inquiry, observation, and reflection. The Lord invites us to use every means of rational inquiry God has given us. Go ahead with the help of history, anthropology, archeology, sociology, and psychology, and test the claims of the gospels. We are only asked to remember the Bible is the Church’s book, and to make our inquiry fairly and without prejudice.

On the road to Emmaus and in the Upper Room Our Lord Jesus laid upon His followers the great and exacting duty our minds have toward Revealed Truth. God has spoken to us. It is incumbent upon us, with all in our capacity, to try to understand Him. Then one day we can join those Samaritans from Sychar. They weren’t even Jews, and came from a town called “city of liars”. But they triumphantly declared to the woman at Jacob’s well: “It is no longer because of your words that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Saviour of the world.”