

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Thirteenth Sunday after Trinity
August 26, 2018

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The bedrock of Our Lord's teaching is that life comes from the Father. In its most basic form that life in spirit. To illustrate His teaching, Jesus once made a pun on the Hebrew word *ruach*, which means both **wind** and **spirit**. Jesus said, "The wind blows and you do not know from whence it comes." That is our everyday experience. We see the trees swaying back and forth, but not the wind which makes the trees blow. No one would ever say a tree moves by itself.

Our Lord tells us, in a similar way, our physical bodies are animated by the spirit put in them by God. This prime force is a condition our physical eyes cannot see. The physical things we can observe as moving parts have as the origin of their motion the Spirit of God we cannot see. Some people understand this truth and some others don't get it.

Giving divine instruction, Jesus is like the patient nursery school teacher. The students are given wooden blocks with letters painted on them. By lining up those blocks the children will learn to recognize, spell, and pronounce words. It's only a first step. And the student has to be open to the idea of arranging the blocks, cooperating with the teacher's encouragement to do so. The student is then on the road to developing vocabulary and learning sentence structure.

The Son of God gives us the information we can use to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit. This student also has to be open to the idea of arranging the blocks! Then he will learn the reasons for faith. If he is not open to this first step then faith becomes more difficult if not impossible.

That is what happened in the gospel passage we heard today. It shows the separation between those who accept Christ's teaching and those who follow an opposite set of rules. In the end these latter people and their way of thinking helped crucify Our Lord. But the twelve Apostles had adopted the other set of rules. Saint Peter described it this way: "We have believed and have come to know."

Ever since then Catholic Christians have been taught the way first described by Peter: to believe first of all on the authority Christ gave His Church, and then come to learn the reasons for the faith which is in them. We believe on our Lord's Word for it what we cannot initially fully understand. This is accepting truth on the

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authority of the Church. That is what Martha of Bethany did after her brother Lazarus had died. She believed what Jesus said not because she understood it but because she had come to have faith in Him Who said it. And the reward for such believing is always a greater awareness of Christ's Person, Presence, and guidance.

We see that very thing in the spiritual progress made by the twelve Apostles in the pages of the New Testament. At first they call Jesus *rabbi* and *master* and *lord*. Then they declare Him to be "the Son of God", which is a correct and formal recognition of His status and authority. But finally they come to know Jesus as "the Holy One of God." Step by step they, and we, progress from believing to *knowing* the truth we have accepted.