

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford at Evensong & Benediction
On the First Sunday of Lent
March 10, 2019

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On Holy Thursday Our Lord gave His Church three great gifts: He instituted the Mass, the ministerial priesthood, and a practical example of love in service. By all accounts this Last Supper took place in the evening. Scripture tells us arrangements for it were made earlier in the day. There was a bit of security and subterfuge involved. As described it has all the hallmarks of a Graham Greene novel. If you think of “*The Third Man*” and all the cloak and dagger stuff, you would be on the right track.

Ever since Palm Sunday the Lord Jesus had been out of sight. That was because, as He said, ‘My hour has not yet come.’ So Jesus gave curious instructions to two disciples. They were to “follow a man carrying a pitcher of water, and when he enters a house, ask the good man of the house for a guest room. And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready. There prepare for us.” (*Mark 14:14-15*)

Who is this good man of the house? Not only the Last Supper but quite probably the Easter Day evening encounter with the Risen Lord and the Pentecost gathering with our Lady all took place in this man’s house. We don’t even know his name, but from what we *do* know it is writ large in the Heavenly realm.

This man must have met Jesus and knew Him, but not as a casual acquaintance. *Jesus trusted him*. This is evident both in the request and response. Jesus asked for a small guest room, but this good man provided the largest and best room, one that had probably already been furnished for his own Passover meal. Some things never change! The guest room goes unused much of the time. And it easily becomes a glorified closet. It’s the place you store porch furniture in winter months. The dresser is filled with your sweaters in moth balls in summer months. But the large upper room, at least in Palestine, is the best and most lavish area in the house. The Lord asked for *καταλυμα* but received *ανάγαιον*. The good man, whoever he was, was asked for the least and gave the best; he was asked for the smallest and gave the largest. He is the good man in the Lord’s house and a sign of the good and faithful layman and laywoman of the Church.

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This good man had learned a thing or two from His Master. He had come to know generosity is in the very nature of God Himself. If we are to follow Jesus we are to “walk the second mile.” Our Lord tells of “the good measure of grain pressed down and running over” the measuring scale. When He turns water into wine at Cana it is in pots “filled to the brim” and “the best wine is saved until now.” In all these ways Christ Jesus invoked our generosity and love in response to His initiative. “We love, because He first loved us.”

Almighty God waited for the Blessed Virgin Mary to say *YES*. The woman at the well was asked to draw water for Jesus. A little boy on a Galilean hillside donated his lunch. On Palm Sunday another man in Jerusalem was asked for a donkey because “The Master hath need of him.” Redemption was not achieved by divine *fiat* followed by a memorandum passed around the universe! Rather, God’s costly generosity invites our similar response.

The Catholic Church was founded in a large upper room furnished. It was our first assembly place, made possible by the very best one man could give. Perhaps it was a thank offering to Jesus for some grace or miracle-cure. What is certain is the Church of Jesus Christ flourishes as there are good men and women responding to God’s work generously. Is there a price to pay? Of course there is! The good man had to find somewhere else at short notice where he and his family could celebrate the Passover. He had given top dollar to God and kept the small change for himself. How often we do it the other way round!

We know God needs nothing from us except the gift of our hearts. He has said so. It is that sanctuary of the heart for which he is most desirous. In a sacramental world our hearts show themselves in outward, visible, and tangible forms. See what can come of generosity! For on one very special night, the Mass was instituted, and so was the apostolic priesthood, and we were given an unforgettable sign of loving service. One man’s room became the location of Heaven on earth. When the Master had a need, look what came from a response in generosity. The generous, loving, layman is there right from the start. And this man said “No, not the guest room for the Master; show them the best room in the house, the large one, the upper room, well furnished.”