

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Palm Sunday
April 14, 2019

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In the gospels the account of the Lord's three-year ministry is not given in the format of a daily diary. Rather, we have clusters of teachings and occasions of healings and other miracles. And the order of events even *varies* somewhat in the different gospel accounts. But when the gospels arrive at Holy Week, things are different. This is only one week in that three-year ministry. But in that week events are measured out carefully, day by day, and later in the week, hour by hour. By Good Friday it is almost minute-by-minute. Clearly, something is going on here. The gospel goes into countdown mode. You can finally account for sixty minutes in the hour. It is cockcrow by cockcrow. And there is a reason for this different treatment. Above all else, Holy Week holds the great saving events of the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Christianity without Holy Week is a philosophy. The Cross makes it a *religion*. The Cross reveals the Glory of God in His Beloved Son. The action in this week of God-in-the-flesh is therefore not for ultimately for our analysis but for our reverence, thanksgiving, and worship.

During the trial of Our Lord, there is that moment when the Jewish high priest Joseph Caiaphas rent his garments and accused Christ of blasphemy. This was not a colorful piece of Yiddish theatre! Caiaphas was a smart man. Well connected in the most important family in Jerusalem, he had undoubtedly received the best education. Caiaphas knew very well the charges against Jesus were false, the crowd was confused, and its witness contradictory. With his patience worn out, the high priest turned to our Lord and asked directly what He claimed to be. If Jesus had answered He was a prophet or a king descended from David, or a reformer and national leader, or even a disturber of the peace, none of that would cause Caiaphas to tear his clothing. But did Jesus claim to be the Christ, the Son of God? The Lord answered him: "I AM." It was the same divine utterance which had thundered down Mt Sinai during the Exodus (and which no man dared to utter or even write) which now reverberated in the judgment hall. Ever since the saving Cross, it is the sweet name of JESUS that is the true Holy Name. And Saint Bernardino insisted the *Name of Jesus* must ever be on our lips. But *before* Good Friday, and amidst the resulting horror in the judgement hall, there were cries of blasphemy. Jesus

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stood there, patiently silent. There was no backpedaling. No effort was made to parse the wording. No communications team was called in to issue a carefully-nuanced statement to the Jerusalem press corps! All of that was left to modern Christian deconstructionists to write books telling us what Jesus really meant.

Well too bad for them. Caiaphas was there! And Caiaphas knew exactly what Jesus really meant. The high priest understood he must judge or misjudge Jesus by His own definition. Christ had given the challenge. His own definition is that He is God, rejected by His Own people. And as a consequence, Eternal Justice was being brought to the bar of a human court and the Author of Life would die on a cross.

The Catholic conviction is that this Man standing before Caiaphas and dying on a Cross now sits in judgment upon us who have made ourselves His judges. This Man who in Holy Week is a prisoner bound with ropes and chains, tells us there will be two classes of judged souls: those who confessed Him and those who denied Him, and that you and I will ultimately come down into one or other of those categories. This Man of Sorrows will point us to one of two final destinies.

The will of the Divine Saviour is that we will have life and have it more abundantly. That is why He came to us. And so in Holy Week we are invited to walk with Jesus the Way of the Cross. And thereafter we are to spend our lives preaching Christ and Him crucified. For there is one point of agreement Christians have with the Lord's accusers. They had cried out, "His Blood be upon us and upon our children." And that is *exactly* where we want It, upon us and our children It is the Blood of Christ which will save us from our sins.