

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Second Sunday of Easter
April 28, 2019

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The events in the Upper Room on Easter Day night were *decisive* for Christian faith. There is a direct connection between what happened that night and our church attendance today. If the Resurrection of Christ happened *but was not communicated* there would be no church then or now. Had the followers of Christ not experienced the *fact* of the Resurrection they would not have gathered at Pentecost for an outpouring of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. The Catholic Church would have been stillborn. In that Upper Room on Easter Sunday night there were two decisive events. The *fact* of the Resurrection was established. And Christ created the apostolate to *communicate* that fact.

Neither St Luke nor St John tell us explicitly it *was* the Upper Room where these things happened. But there is no reason for us to place the events anywhere else. Most of the Lord's followers were from Galilee, not Jerusalem. It makes sense to conclude these men were hiding in a place they all knew. They knew the Upper Room, the *Cenacle*, because they had gathered there for the Last Supper. And they *were hiding*. They were also making a plan. It could be summed up in one word: *Skedaddle!* The disciples were planning to slip out of Jerusalem one by one under cover of darkness. They needed to avoid arrest in any mopping-up action following the Lord's Crucifixion. The events we commemorate in the gospel probably interrupted their planning meeting! And did it ever!

The Resurrection faith had been born Easter Day morning at the empty tomb. That faith was an *inference* from the absence of the Lord's Body, and from the peculiar way the grave clothes had been left behind. But an inference is like circumstantial evidence in a court of law. It does not lead to conviction. In religion circumstantial evidence is a non-starter. However, no inference can explain what happened subsequent to the Upper Room experience on Easter Sunday night.

Consider Saint Peter's conduct. During the Passion he had denied Christ and gone into hiding. On Easter Day evening he was planning his escape from Jerusalem. But several weeks after the Crucifixion of Christ, Peter was seen boldly addressing the whole Jerusalem leadership. He took on all comers! Peter said, "This Jesus Whom you crucified, is both Lord and Christ." Let the high priest tear his clothes again, twenty times over if he wishes! Christ is risen. Deal with it! That is Peter's

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proclamation and attitude. Clearly it was not from the *inference* of an empty tomb or collapsed grave clothes that Peter and the others were so dramatically emboldened. It was because on Easter Day night in the Upper Room they had experienced the visible appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ risen from the grave.

Two thousand years later the strongest evidence of the fact of the Resurrection is the very existence of the Catholic Church, her life and sacraments, her martyrs and saints, even her 850-year-old burned cathedrals, and, decisively her consistent proclamation of the Gospel message. But on what objective basis did that life of the Church *begin*? For us the Church herself is the objective evidence. But for the Apostles the empty tomb alone could not bear the weight of the whole gospel proclamation. There simply is no getting around the testimony that in the Upper Room the eleven remaining disciples did in sober fact encounter a truly objective return of the One Who was dead and Who is alive for evermore. Whatever may be the faith or lack of faith in subsequent generations, the record is clear those eleven men were convinced by their own experience that Christ is risen. The experience gave them the certainty of absolute conviction. It is only that conviction which explains subsequent events: the heroic preaching of Peter, the conversion of Paul, the steadfast courage in the face of suffering and death on the part of early Christians, and the spread of the Catholic faith around the world.

You and I were not in that Upper Room. But we belong to the Apostolic Church. And because of the apostolic experience in that Upper Room, the ancient day of worship, the Sabbath, was changed to the next day, Sunday. If Jesus had been a good man of unparalleled holiness and love, and had died in a supreme act of self-sacrifice on a Cross, perhaps in memory of Him some of His followers would have adopted *Friday* as a commemoration. No one would ever have appointed Sunday! Sunday was the first day of the workweek! But as it so happens that Jesus, the Son of God, rose from the dead on *Sunday*, and appeared in His crucified body to His disciples on Sunday, then *Sunday becomes the day!* You and I worship Him on Sunday as our participation in that apostolic witness. It is our direct connection to the Upper Room! Sunday by Sunday as you drive to church the sacred trust is in your hands just as much as the steering wheel of your automobile. And the sacred trust is of the saving truth of the Risen Lord Jesus Christ. *Alleluia!*