

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Fifth Sunday of Easter
May 19, 2019

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Last Sunday was Good Shepherd Sunday. The Mass gospel today focuses on the *provision* of the Shepherd for His sheep. We get it in a snippet of the Last Discourse of Our Lord Jesus at the Last Supper. As the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls, the Blessed Lord gave His twelve disciples a share in His eternal priesthood. Then we are told that Judas Iscariot went out. (Keep that thought as we go on.) The eleven remaining disciples will be called Apostles because The Holy Ghost will send them out into the world. *Apostello* means **sent**. And they will be sent from Christ with a share of His eternal priesthood.

All of this took place on the day we call Maundy Thursday. You can think of this day as the *endowment* of the Catholic ministry. One feature of this day, the Lord's washing of His disciples feet, is a ceremony of ordination. You do not see it at a modern-day ordination. The service is long enough! This year's diocesan ordination was yesterday and took three hours.

What you *do* see is a priest vested with a chasuble, his hands consecrated with holy oil, and given a chalice and paten. These instruments are the modern-day symbols of the prophetic office, the authority to bind and loose, and to bless and consecrate. Saint Francis of Assisi once remarked if he ever met an angel and a priest at the same moment he should greet the priest first. Why? An angel brings God's message. *A priest brings God Himself*. And the chief ingredient in these magnificent gifts is Christ's *constancy*. The Lord does not allow the graces bestowed in the sacraments to depend upon the holiness of the administrator. The editors of secular newspapers do not understand why even a defrocked priest is still allowed to give last rites under the emergency condition of imminent death.

When Our Lord wanted to make a solemn pronouncement He used special language. He would say "Verily, verily, I say unto you." We sometimes do that in a typed manuscript by the indication *nota bene*. Dr. Dora Chaplin's lectures contained the warning, "Boys, take out a clean sheet of paper." When St Athanasius was about to preach, his contemporaries would remind people to take out paper and write it down. They said, "And if you have no paper, *write it on your shirt!*"

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In His Last discourse Our Lord said to His disciples, “Verily, verily, I say unto you whomsoever I send receiveth Me.” And of course He had also said this earlier in His ministry. In St Matthew’s Chapter 10 Jesus declared, “Whosoever receiveth you receiveth Me.” On that earlier occasion among those so commissioned and sent was none other than Judas Iscariot! Christ Jesus was thinking down all the ages of history, and not just about Judas, when He wanted His followers to know that even a traitor’s ministerial acts were valid. That is because *everything depends on Christ’s grace* and not man’s goodness. The Blessed Lord, Good Shepherd that He is, will not permit His people to be deprived of the means of grace, either by lack of sacraments, or the unworthiness of the priest. Christ’s viewpoint is the only one that counts. Remember that when reading the secular press. In the Upper Room on Maundy Thursday the Lord declared, “Ye are clean, *but not all.*” The apostolic college as a body did not lose Christ’s verdict of holiness even though one of them was a traitor to his Lord.

Ordination is *indelible*. It is like Baptism. For this life, Holy Matrimony is like that too. One reason the Church gets into trouble with the secular mindset is because the Church protects the indelibility. It would be easy to get into the divorce business and leave off all the juridical acrobatics and confusion of annulments. It would be convenient to tell a man he is undone as a priest because he has been removed from his assignment. Just think, for those denying their faith we could have a rubber stamp declaring their baptism *null and void*. But the Lord Jesus did not give us authority to operate that way. Christ made it clear way back on Maundy Thursday the graces given in the sacraments, and His very Body and Blood, come to us by way of those who may prove disloyal to Him. *It is all about constancy*. The constancy of the Lord may sometimes be inconvenient to us or hard to understand. But Christ’s constancy is a sign to us of the great and abiding love of the Good Shepherd.