

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after The Epiphany  
January 19, 2020

+

Last Sunday's gospel at Mass was Saint Matthew's account of the Baptism of Our Lord. Today's gospel is from Saint John. But it is *not* John's account of the Baptism! Read it carefully! Saint John always means more than he says! All three synoptic gospels, (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) tell us after His Baptism Our Lord Jesus was driven into the wilderness to be tempted by Satan. (The Temptation in the Wilderness is always the Gospel on the First Sunday in Lent.) And we are told the duration of the temptation: *forty days*.

Saint John the Evangelist does not need to recount either the Baptism or the Temptation, since the synoptic gospels have already done that. That is what in the Fourth Gospel sets up the *return visit* of Our Lord to John the Baptist. The Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, had descended upon Jesus at His Baptism and had triumphed over Satan in the wilderness. Now, *forty days later*, the Lord returned to where John had continued to perform his baptism of repentance at the Jordan River. It was when Jesus was *coming toward* John that the Baptist announced "The Lamb of God."

What follows is what the vocabulary of literature calls a *flashback*. The Baptist thinks back to the Baptism of Christ and describes for his own disciples that moment and its meaning and significance. The Baptist ends the flashback testimony by declaring: "Now I have seen and testified that He is the Son of God." (That exclamation is the whole purpose of the Fourth Gospel, as St John the Evangelist declares in xx.31.) And then after the flashback and testimony, and what you did *not* hear (because not included in today's gospel passage) were verses 35-36. "Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as He walked, he said, "Behold the Lamb of God." *John stood*. We can assume the Evangelist had no interest in describing the *posture* of John the Baptist, that he was standing. John stood means it was the *Sabbath*, the day of rest, when even the Baptist's own ministry was shut down for the day and the crowds were gone. John was *doing nothing* except being with two of his disciples and alert to see Christ again. And that is when John the Baptist repeated "Behold the Lamb of God." We are told the two disciples heard John speak *and they followed Jesus*.

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius  
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after The Epiphany  
January 19, 2020

+

Here then is a description of the beginning of the Catholic Church, and the people who decide the Mass lectionary left it out! This is the great day when the Church began to find its Saviour, and the passage is omitted. Right here the heavenly attraction began to exercise its mysterious power. Why mysterious? Our Lord tells us later. “No man can come to me except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” *John 6:44*. Again, St John the Evangelist always means more than he says.

And at that great moment, describing the destiny of the Catholic Church, the Lord Jesus appeared to be *walking away*! The day before He had “come unto” them. But now He is described simply as “walking.” And so it seems right from the very beginning of the Church that, in the development of our calling as Christ’s disciples, there is the approach and attraction of the Lamb of God, and then what appears as His leaving us. But we must follow those very first disciples. We must pursue Him in faith and love as they did, until we too fully enjoy His fellowship.