

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Second Sunday of Easter
April 19, 2020

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The Gospel at Mass today reminds us life is not always neat and tidy! On Easter Sunday night all the remaining Apostles were present and accounted for *except one!* If the Lord Jesus could die on a cross on Friday and then be conversing and dining with His friends on Sunday it is certainly within His means to have everybody present when He wanted them! But in the affairs of God Incarnate we have come to know *nothing happens by chance*. Almighty God coming back for Saint Thomas was not a mopping-up operation!

The Lord once solemnly told His followers to think of Almighty God as a Good Shepherd. The image Jesus gave us is of a shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine sheep that are safe and seeks out the one that is lost. One week after the Resurrection the Good Shepherd was doing just that: He sought out the one Apostle who had not been present on Easter Sunday evening. This incident rings true to a *consistent character trait* in our Blessed Lord: His concern and love for all never diminishes His care for each.

In coming back for St Thomas Our Lord also revealed how essential apostolic witness is to the life of His Church. St Paul would pick up on the apostolic nature of the Church, saying it is “built upon the foundation of the twelve apostles, Christ Jesus Himself being the chief cornerstone.” That would be St Paul’s later reflection. But for *one whole week* after the Day of Resurrection itself try to imagine how *difficult* it was for St Thomas to face the excitement and earnestness with which his colleagues urged upon him the Gospel good news that Christ is Risen! The Lord had given these men the *power* of the Holy Spirit to do this very thing. Thomas was facing men who, like him, would later be responsible for the creation of whole national churches. Yet the power of that witness did not work on this one apostle. And there is a reason it did not work. The Lord Jesus had called Thomas to be an Apostle, and the Lord Himself had set the conditions: the apostles must be eyewitnesses to the resurrection. By Divine direction, Thomas must see for himself.

Just as redemption once upon a time awaited the simple word *yes* from a young Jewish girl named Mary, so too there is something of the mystery of God’s condescension, loving kindness, and involvement in human affairs, that not only

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made the Risen Lord come back for Thomas but also made the Gospel proclamation *wait* for Thomas. When we no longer look through a glass darkly we shall realize the involvement of Jesus Christ in His Church is far closer and more intimate than we can now imagine.

The Apostles understood very little the power the Risen Lord conferred upon them. It would be a joyful surprise, and an ongoing source of strength, for the Apostles that when they told the story of the Lord, men and women worldwide would be ready to believe because of their testimony. The power of this apostolic ingredient would not be of their own making, of course, but it would continue from their day right down to our very own.

St Thomas had to see for himself. But he wasn't making conditions. He was asking for contact with His Lord, and whatever might come as a result of that contact was the Lord's business. *Thomas wanted Jesus and only Jesus*, and the Lord, of course, knew that. And this is very close to the blessedness Christ then said was the condition of "those who have not seen and yet believe." *Which is where you and I come in!*

Remember that a very long time ago Almighty God had declared to unfaithful Israel: "Behold, I have graven you on the palms of my hands." (*Isaiah 49:16*). When Thomas was invited to look at the hands of the crucified-now-risen Lord he saw his name in the mark of the nails. And your name and my name are written there too.