

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The Fifth Sunday of Easter
May 10, 2020

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The Lord Jesus, Who showed His love so beautifully in custom-tailored appearances to fit the various personalities of His disciples, also gave us a different way to faith. In today's gospel the Good Shepherd described that He is *All*. Jesus is the *Way* to God, the *Truth* to guide us on our pilgrimage, and the *Life* to enlighten and sustain us so that we will stay the course.

This fundamental assertion of the Gospel is a stumbling block for many people who think of themselves as Christian but who are in fact something less. For them, Jesus is *a* way to salvation, but there are other ways. This thinking leads people to a different relationship to Christ's Church than the only one on offer. You cannot define the Church's mission and role by the seat of your pants! Not having accepted Christ's offer is what inevitably leads to misunderstanding the Church's mission.

The First Epistle of St Peter reminds us that, in the scheme of salvation, Christ is *the chief cornerstone*. This is a memorable phrase, whether you have been trained to be a chief building contractor or never got beyond tinker toys. If the cornerstone is wrong, you can build carefully and exactly upon it and will still come out wrong. Theology is no different from any other science or logic, or recipe for making a cake. If the premise is wrong, or the first ingredients, so will be the conclusion. And we must not be confused if some of the steps along the way sound right. Many things wrong and in the headlines today can be traced back to the answer to the question Jesus put at Capernaum: "Who do you say that I am?" Back then there were multiple choices for answers. And we have them too. But *only one answer is correct*. If you get that wrong, not only do you get everything about the Church wrong, you get the world wrong.

In today's Gospel Christ declares that He is *All*. That means Jesus is our access to eternal life. And He tells us to concentrate on this way. He even gives His estimate His first disciples were making progress in this regard. He said "Whither I go, ye know the way." They know the way because *they were beginning to know Him Who is the way*.

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There is a painting showing three men in a foot race. The youngest runner is a boy skipping along the route joyfully delighted to be getting some exercise. He keeps to the course but is not especially looking towards the finish line. The second runner is a middle-aged man who has fixed his eyes on the goal, which is motivating his efforts. The third runner is an old man running with his eyes looking carefully at the ground and carefully following the marked course. In a remarkable way this painting illustrates the stages of Christian life. Just as there is joy in running with the vigor of a newly discovered faith, we then learn to “look away to Jesus” as we run, and finally, with the carefulness of many years, watch our steps in the way which leads to Christ.

This is Gospel living in all the stages of life. Gospel living means acceptance of what is on offer. In accepting *Truth*, and to follow the *Way*, is to come to *Life*.