

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on The 2nd Sunday after The Epiphany
January 17, 2021

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One topic for discussion in confirmation classes begins with the question: “When did the Catholic Church begin?” What would get your vote? The children usually pick Pentecost; they had learned it was “The Birthday of the Church.” That was because of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to guide and guard the Church and to lead her into all truth. You would not be wrong voting for Pentecost.

There are *other* moments to consider as the start of the Church. Adults sometimes picked the moment on Good Friday when Blood and water flowed from the side of the dead Christ. A soldier opened the side of Jesus with a spear to make sure He was dead, and Catholics understand *this* moment as the fountain of the sacramental life of the Church. A strong case can be made for saying this is when the Catholic Church began.

A third choice, perhaps not often thought of, is *today's gospel*. Here is the moment we are told “they followed Jesus.” St Andrew is identified. The other man is unnamed but perhaps is St John himself, who does not like to name himself in his own Gospel account. He calls himself “the beloved disciple.” That is the biblical prototype of a *nom de plume*. (Some of you remember Winston Churchill’s *History of the Second World War*, in which he refers to himself as “Former Naval Person.”) At any rate, St Andrew and St John were the first in a long line of followers of Jesus Christ. It is a *long* line because it includes you and me. So the case may be made that *this* is the moment to mark the start of the Catholic Church.

Most of us became adult followers of Christ after we heard someone else’s witness. That experience goes all the way back to Andrew and John. They heard about Jesus from John the Baptist. But Andrew and John were not yet directed to become the Lord’s disciples. When they asked where Jesus was staying, He didn’t tell them to fill out an application form! The Lord graciously replied, “Come and see.”

Sometimes a teacher opens the classroom discussion by posing a difficult question. It may be about diagramming a complex sentence, or a problem in mathematics. (I remember a parent-teacher day, sitting in on an Honors Calculus Two class. The teacher invited the parents to help solve the problem. I wanted to hide under the

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desk!) But if none of the students could offer a solution, the teacher would say, “Let’s do it together.” He would invite the class to “come and see.” That was the way Jewish rabbis used to teach. They would present some hard point of the Law, and when it appeared to the students there was no solution, the rabbi would share his own knowledge by first saying, “come and see.”

The difference between that type of scenario and the gospel good news is that there is no difficult problem of the Law, or calculus, to solve! “Come and see” is the invitation to spend time with Jesus and find in Him the very center for our lives.

Abiding with Jesus is more important than hearing about Him. That is true even if the teacher is as eminent as John the Baptist. John had pointed to Jesus and said, “Behold the Lamb of God.” (We use those very words in the Mass just prior to communion. “Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him that taketh away the sins of the world.”) John the Baptist had given correct instruction. But that was only sufficient to get Andrew and John interested in learning more. At this point they were still non-committal. Even when they asked Jesus where He was staying they still only called Him “*rabbi*”...teacher. It is *after* Andrew and John had stayed with Jesus that wonderful day that they raced to their respective brothers, Simon and James, and announced, “We have found the Messiah...the Christ.”

The Kingdom of Heaven on earth began that day with these first two citizens coming to believe Jesus is the Messiah, and then, at the first opportunity, going to bring other souls to Christ. If you voted for today’s Gospel, you are also right. For the Catholic Church this is as good a starting place as any!

What happens after that? Well, after that, the *real* adventure begins. Once we know the Lord, we no longer choose what we will do for Him. Rather, from now on, Blessed Jesus chooses what He will do in, and through, us.