

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Septuagesima Sunday
January 31, 2021

+

The season after Christmas and before Lent, begins with the three great epiphanies or *showings* of Our Lord Jesus Christ. These are to the Magi, at His Baptism, and in the first miracle of our Lord at Cana in Galilee. And then the season continues by recounting other occasions recorded in the early chapters of St Mark's Gospel. These describe the preaching and miracles of God Incarnate to a wondering, and then believing, people. They observe a qualitative difference between Jesus and what they had known before. They say: "He taught as one who had *authority*, and not as the scribes."

As soon as Christ began to preach He began to work miracles. His miracles demonstrate what He taught, and the people made the connection. When Christ performed a miracle they asked: "What *new doctrine* is this?" They connected what Jesus did with what He said, *and they listened carefully*.

In today's Gospel passage the people came to the realization Jesus had *authority*. It is easy to see word **author** as the root word in *authority*. We often use the word *authority* as derivative. A government confers authority on a police department to keep the peace. But we cheapen the word *authority* when we dilute or forget the *connection to the author*.

A maker of fine cabinets might very well plant the seedlings for the types of trees whose grains of wood he selects for the various styles of tables he plans to build. He cuts the trees, planes the boards, and makes the table to his own design. He then finishes the table by alternating fine sanding and coats of varnish or lacquer. To the extent the cabinetmaker has participated in his own creative act, this man is an *authority on tables*.

Another man, who has never walked in the woods, let alone used a saw or planer, has read everything there is on the history of table making. He can identify all styles, and is knowledgeable in the art of inlaid wood and joinery. He can tell you the origin of a table down to the century of its making, sometimes even to the decade, the town, and name of the cabinetmaker. We say this man is an authority on tables. But in point of fact he is not an authority but a *scholar*. Authority, truly speaking, belongs to the author or creator of a thing, and not to those who know

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Septuagesima Sunday
January 31, 2021

+

about it, however vast their knowledge. When Jesus taught, and when He cured the sick, He astonished crowds who had heard the experts and scholars and professionals. The crowds said Jesus was different. He “had *authority*, and not as the scribes.”

Our Lord’s preaching astonished people because He taught as one Who was at one with the mind of God. His healings commanded evil without any appeal to a higher power. (The disciples themselves were witnesses one night during a storm at sea. Jesus ordered the wind and waves to cease much as a father tells his unruly children to settle down!) And these miracles confirmed what the crowd suspected when it heard the Lord preach: He had some kind of direct and personal connection with the creative source of life.

In the gospels our Lord says to Philip: “He who has seen me has seen the Father.” And in St Mark’s Gospel we are told to take the Son as being the same as the Father. There are links in the chain of being between Jesus walking the streets of Capernaum, and the Divine Creator and source of life. But those links are too tight and close for us to ever find a separation between them. *Jesus has authority*. And this means He is not a scholar who knows the ways of God. *He is God*.

So when Our Lord makes provision for His Church He says: “As the Father has sent Me, even so send I you.” The author is *in* the authority. This is not the delegation of one who is absent. *Jesus is conferring Himself*. When the Church preaches, or baptizes, or offers the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, it is Christ present, not as spectator, or because we think of Him more intensely at such moments! It is the Lord Himself Who is the initiator, the high priest, preaching, and baptizing, and offering Himself at the altar.

In their own simple but profound way, the people of Galilee got it right. They concluded Jesus is “a teacher come from God.” After the gift of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost, the apostles and early church fathers gave us words like *Christ*, *Redeemer*, *Mediator*, and *Saviour*. Because on being One with the Father Who is author of life, Jesus is the authority Who releases us from our sins.