

The Congregation of Saint Athanasius
A sermon preached by Father Bradford on Sexagesima Sunday
February 7, 2021

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Today's Gospel describes Our Lord Jesus going about His business. God came to live with us so He could die for us. When His friends suggested He should stay in one place and rest upon His growing reputation, Jesus refused. Way back in *The Book of Judges* it was written: "The inhabitants of the villages in Israel shall rehearse the righteous acts of the Lord." Jesus was determined to go to those villages.

Eventually people would have to decide for or against the Lord. To bring people to that point, Jesus went to work. He built up a following. Early on He gave His inner circle of disciples a mysterious and beautiful sign of the character of His ministry. His first miracle, at a wedding in Cana of Galilee was no crowd-stunning performance. The miracle changing water into wine was very much unnoticed. Only the wine steward, and perhaps Our Lady, had some idea of just what had happened. That miracle set the tone for our Lord's ministry.

It has been said the Christian faith is "caught, not taught." Something is at work inside us which convinces us Jesus is the Son of God. Christians learn to recognize this "something" is *Someone*: the Holy Ghost. When Simon Peter erupted with the declaration: "Thou art the Son of the Living God," Jesus replied: "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you." It was not miracles or teaching *per se* but the inner working of God Himself which had led to Peter's declaration.

All the proofs and arguments may be laid out, but it is always the Holy Ghost Who provides the interior way of knowing. He is the One Who "connects the dots" in us. A surgeon sometimes has to bring bad news from his operating room to the waiting room. Many years ago a prominent Chicago surgeon observed that Christians took the bad news better. Dr. Louis Mella told me at lunch one day he discovered "Christians grieve well." That observation led him to Jesus Christ. No well-intended explanation of Christ's miracles or teaching would have succeeded. But people weeping quietly in a hospital waiting room did that for Dr. Mella. There is nothing more effective than the example of a life lived in sincere conformity to Christ's teaching. Remember, St Francis said "Preach the Gospel; use words if necessary."

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When the Samaritan woman at the well told her townspeople about Jesus, they came back with her. But then having been with the Lord, they told her: “We no longer believe because of you, but because we have seen for ourselves.” Telling only goes so far.

In our Gospel at Mass today Jesus is laying the groundwork for what will be revealed later. Those who have eyes to see and ears to hear will come to faith. The Lord is seen taking care of thousands of souls to whom it was only revealed He was a prophet. Nothing in His ministry ever said: “I am God; take it or leave it.” They weren’t ready for that.

Giving witness to why we have faith can encourage others to begin practicing Christian discipline, and gradually come to an inner appreciation of the Christian life. But our faith cannot convince someone else who has not already become receptive to this kind of knowing. That is what is meant when people say Christian faith is “caught, not taught.” It is as St Paul put it: “I planted, Apollos watered, but *God giveth the increase.*”