

“Come and see, the heavens are open!” John 1:43-51

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, “Follow me.” Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael and said to him, “We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.” Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!” Nathanael said to him, “How do you know me?” Jesus answered him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” Nathanael answered him, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” Jesus answered him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” And he said to him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

For today’s meditations we have this section from the gospel according John where He describes how the first few disciples of Jesus were called to follow Him. For one, He tells us how this happened, but there is something more, very important for us to understand.

We can see in these verses a summary of Christian discipleship. That is, how we are made Jesus disciples and what happens when we become ones. Let’s take a look verse by verse so that we can see how all of this works.

How people are made Jesus disciples and what happens then. First, John describes how Jesus called Phillip. And right away we have our first lesson to learn. So often people think about becoming a Christian, or being a Christian as something that we chose to do. As if it was our choice.

There are some who chose to become Christians, and there are some who chose not to. We can understand this thinking quite well. For when we look from our perspective, then it may seem that - really, it was me, who did the choosing.

With John we can see quite different a picture. Jesus Himself comes to Phillip. Jesus Himself calls Phillip. It means that the first step is made by God, by the Son of God and not by us.

Yes, we can say, - but it applies only to this situation. No, this is how God works. He comes to us first. He speaks to us through others, He sends people to tell us the truth about this world, about us and about Him who created all of this.

He always, always comes to us first. Through His messengers, through His message and through His Spirit. Once He has come to us, once the invitation is made, then we have this frightening freedom to say ‘no’.

God the Creator, the source of all life gives us, His tiny and rebellious creatures this incredible freedom to say 'no' to His invitation. Yes, He does. And so often we misuse this freedom, for our own sorrow and grief.

But, you are here. Do you know what it means? These are great news for you. First, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, to whom all authority is given in heaven and on earth, He has called you to be a member of His family.

He sent someone, or may be many messengers to you, to call you, to invite you, to show that you, yes, each of you, that you are important for Him. That He wants you to know the truth about this world, to be with you here and that He wants you to be a part of the eternal world to come.

The fact that you are here means both that Jesus Christ has called you by His message and by His Holy Spirit, and also, that you haven't rejected His call. Blessed are you, who are called and have said your 'yes'! Blessed, indeed.

What happened next as John retold it? Phillip went home and lived happily ever after. Yes? No? Of course, not. As John told us, Phillip went and found Nathanael. This is what happens when you are called by God and the Holy Spirit reveals you the truth.

You can't just sit silent. You need to share these news. For they are life changing news. These are news that creates a different reality. Reality where there is this loving God, who cares for you daily. For you, yes, for you!

Who calls you, who wants to be with you, who is coming to restore the goodness of His creation, so that all bad things outside of us or inside of us, from which we suffer every day, are taken away. Only pure and beautiful goodness remains.

And He calls you to be a part of it. And not only you. Everyone. He extends this offer to everyone, and He sends you to share this offer, to be His messengers, to invite everyone to His heavenly feast.

This is what Phillip did and this is what we all are called to do. For, you see, the Kingdom of God is something very different than anything in this world. If we have to share with others something here, there remains less for us.

With the Kingdom of God it is different. The more we share, the more we have, the greater joy we have, the more we can experience it already here, in this life. I am sure that many of you know it from your own experience. What a joy it is when someone else comes to the truth and becomes a child of God.

But it is not always easy. Probably it is never easy. For there is a catch. Even those people who believe there is God, don't want to come to Him. We can see it also with Nathanael. What did He say, when Phillip called Him?

Phillip said that they had found the One of whom Moses and the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth. And Nathanael said. Let's go, bring me to Him! No. He said something different.

“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” There is more in this saying that meets the eye at a first sight. It is not simply critique of Nazareth. It is not simple a doubt that may be Nazareth is not the place to which the prophets pointed.

There is something deeper. There is something that is at work every time when we want people to know the truth and to come to Christ. Can you guess what it is? Think about this – what would it mean for someone to find that there is God?

More, that He has revealed Himself, His will for our lives and His attitude towards us? What would it mean? One thing. You are not a god. You can't be like God anymore for there is somebody else, true God.

It would mean to acknowledge the truth, that, in fact, we are creatures. God's creation. He is the Creator, we are work of His hands. It would take away our imaginary freedom. We couldn't do what we want. Instead, we should do what God wants.

This is it. Fear to lose our god-likeness. Fear that we'll have to give up our freedom and to be forced to do what we don't know. This is what was hidden beneath Nathanael's answer.

By asking ‘can anything good come out of Nazareth’ he essentially said, ‘there can't be anything good, therefore I don't even want to know about it’. This is what today people say. Can anything good be in the Church? No...

They will be quick to point to bad examples, and we have many bad examples, thanks to us. But essentially they will do this to protect their ‘god-likeness’, their imaginary freedom.

What about this freedom? Do we really lose our freedom by becoming Christians? There is one illustration that can help us a lot. People sometimes think that freedom is when you can do whatever you want, or at least, whatever you decide yourself.

This is so wrong. Imagine a fish. According to this understanding of freedom, the fish would be free only if she could do whatever she decides, for example, to spend some time on dry land. Would it work? No.

The point is, the true freedom is not when you can do whatever you want or decide, but when you can live as who you are created to be. The true freedom is when you can and want live as what you are created to be.

We are created to live in relationships with God and one another. God and neighbour is our water. God and neighbour is our water! Without God we are like

fish on dry land. That's right. Once the Holy Spirit helps our hearts to see this truth, we are on our way to live a life of freedom.

Nathanael said 'no'. Phillip said 'come, come and see, for yourself.' This is what we should do. There can be many situations when we can't persuade others that there is something good in Christianity.

Then simply say: "Come and see." This is not that hard. But we also need to be clear what we are trying to show. Not us. It is something we need to strive to, to create a community where everyone is accepted and loved for the sake of Christ.

The community where we live what we confess, where we consider others more important than ourselves, where we ask for forgiveness and forgive, where people who can't overcome their conflict otherwise can be reconciled.

The community where people can experience truth and love as nowhere else. This is what we need to strive for. And as much as we succeed in creating this kind of community, we can give a testimony to what the Holy Spirit can create here.

But this is not what we want to invite people to see. Not us, but Christ. Phillip didn't say, look at me, I'm a new man now. No, he said 'come and I'll show you Jesus Christ'.

This is what we need to invite people to see. Jesus Christ. We need to bring them where Jesus is present. And He is present in His word. Wherever the Bible is read, discussed, taught, wherever the message of God's love is preached, there Jesus Himself is present. This is where you need to bring them.

Very practically, invite them to see Jesus in our services, in our Bible studies, or bring them to talk with your pastor. Share the news of God's love and your joy will be great here and even more in the world to come.

Then we can read about exchange between Jesus and Nathanael. Jesus says that He knows Nathanael. Nathanael wonders how. Jesus explains that He saw Him under the fig tree. Then Nathanael realizes that Jesus really is someone ...

... someone He can't exactly name. We don't know what happened under the fig tree. May be some kind of revelation. May be Nathanael's confession, which would lead Jesus to say that he was true Israelite, in whom there was no deceit.

We don't know. Whatever it was, it prompted Nathanael to call Jesus the King of Israel, the Son of God. That is, He realized that Jesus is someone more than simply a man standing before Him.

This is what happens, when people come to the true faith. They realize, no, the Holy Spirit persuades them that Jesus is someone special, more than simply a great teacher or influential leader.

But what is more important – what followed after that. “You will see greater things than these. Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

Nathanael didn’t comprehend the magnitude of what was just revealed to Him. We don’t either. Especially when we make our first steps following Christ. There were two pictures which Jesus put in these few words.

One was ‘heavens open and angels ascending and descending’. Another was ‘the Son of Man’. The first one brought His listeners back to Genesis, to what Jacob, their forefather experienced. In vision He saw the heavens open, angels ascending and descending and God Himself stood above it.

God Himself was the focus of His vision. The second picture about the Son of Man comes from the book of Daniel. Again God revealed him what was going to happen.

“With the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.” (Dan 7:13-14)

This was Jesus message to Nathanael, and this is His message to you. He is not simply someone special, He is the One, the One who has no beginning and no end. The one through whom and for whom is everything that is.

He is the One, who so loves you, that He came as a man, as one of us, so that He can take your brokenness, your tears, your shame and guilt, and to give you His life, His joy, His honour and His eternal Kingdom.

This is the place where the heavens are open and angels are descending and God Himself is present. The fact that you are here shows that you are so blessed, you have received His call, you haven’t rejected it, and when the times comes, you will see Him as He is.

Now, if you want your joy to be even greater, share it with others, tell them: “Come and see!”

Amen.