

“Your brother Bartholomew”. 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.”

Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Today is the day in the Church year, when we remember one of the apostles, Bartholomew. We don’t know much about him. But we have this reading from the Gospel according to John about the call of Philip and Nathanael. What is that about?

It is quite simple, in the first three Gospel accounts, when the names of the twelve apostles are listed (Matt 10, Mark 3, Luke 6), every time they contain the name of Bartholomew and every time his name is mentioned together with Philip.

The name of Bartholomew simply means “son-of-Talmay”. It is believed that in the Gospel according to John Bartholomew, i.e. “son of Talmay” is called by his proper name, Nathanael, which means “God gives”. That’s why we have this Gospel reading.

It is an edifying reading. It gives us insights about **how Bartholomew was called, how he was sent and where he got the strength to carry on the way he did**, it also gives us insights into how we are called, sent and where we get the strength to carry on.

So, how was Bartholomew called? It is quite simple. Just like you. The Triune God calls us and gathers us by the Gospel. That’s it. The Holy Spirit does it. This is what always happens. Always. The Son of God always comes looking for us.

It was so with Adam. “**Adam, where are you?**” It was so with every human being after the Fall. It was so with you. While we are dead in our sins, the Son of God comes to us and speaks into us a new life and reveals Himself to us as who He truly is.

And who is He? He is the One who was from the beginning, He is the One the Holy Scriptures point to, He is the One whose knowledge is written on our hearts, He is the one true God, He is the One all human beings long for in our hearts.

Our God has made each one of us unique, He also approaches each one of us in a unique way. John the Baptist rejoiced in mother's womb, when He felt the presence of Jesus. Decades later he told his disciples: "Behold, the Lamb of God!"

They heard the word spoken through John and responded, they followed Jesus, they encountered Him face-to-face and immediately Andrew rushed to tell His brother Simon what had happened.

"Simon, Simon, we have found Him. The Messiah, the Christ!" What joy and hope-filled excitement! He brought Simon to Jesus. "Come, come, you have to meet Him!" He wanted his brother Simon to see, hear and experience what He just had. "Come!"

Then Jesus approached Philip: "Follow me!" When God speaks, we listen. And immediately Philip goes and finds Nathanael: "Listen, we have found Him of whom the Law and the prophets wrote. Come, come, you should see Him!" Some of you were brought to Jesus by your parents, some of you by your friends, we all were brought to Him by someone. That's how the Lord works – through us.

And whoever was brought to Jesus, they discovered something heart-warming. Jesus already knew them. That's right, this God who is behind everything, who is the beginning and the end, whose existence we have sensed, He surprises us.

He reveals Himself to us, and as we are overwhelmed by this encounter, we learn that while we didn't know Him, He has always known us, better than we do, that He has always been with us, caring for us, gently calling us and patiently waiting for us.

It was so with Nathanael. Jesus said: "**Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!**" "How do you know me?" "I do, Nathanael, I do, more than you know!" "**Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.**"

We don't know what happened under the fig tree, but we know what it meant to Nathanael. "**Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!**" What an incredible confession! You are the Son of God! What did Nathanael see before him?

Jesus from Nazareth. The son of Joseph. His mother, brothers and sisters still lived there. A man just like us. "**You are the Son of God!**" Only encountering the Triune God directly can grant such a divine insight.

That's how God called Bartholomew. That is how He calls us. He reveals to us who He is, the Holy Spirit makes us a new creation, and we can't help, but we run to those we love and tell them with excitement: "We have found Him, the one true God, Jesus!"

And that is how through us Jesus will call the next generation of disciples and the next till the end of the age, until all the seats in His heavenly banquet are filled.

How was Nathanael, or Bartholomew sent? How did it work out for him to follow this Son of God, the King of Israel, the Messiah? Did he get to live his dream life, to achieve his life goals? And how are we sent? What can we learn?

There are different testimonies in the Church's tradition. It is plausible that because Bartholomew was sent as Jesus' witness, he was crucified upside down, just as Peter was. Another testimony tells that he was beaten, then crucified somewhere in India. Yet another that he was skinned alive and then beheaded. Because he followed Jesus.

So, yes, he ended up pretty much the same way as all the apostles. Dying violent deaths simply because they were bringing the Good News that in Jesus God has reconciled the world to Himself, and that there is life, eternal life for everyone in the name of Jesus, to be received as a gift in faith, no merits required.

We are called and sent just as Bartholomew was. This is true. We are not called and sent to fulfill our dreams, to enjoy our prosperity, to rejoice in worldly recognition, to endlessly pursue our comfort, wellbeing and pleasures. None of that.

We could make a little gallery at the entrance to the church. For those who are interested in Christian faith. First, we can have Jesus on the cross. This is our founder and Master. Then Peter... crucified upside down.

Then James... beheaded. Then Bartholomew... skinned alive and murdered. Then the rest of the disciples. This was, so to speak, the first class of Jesus' disciples. And they were joined by countless others, and still every day someone loses their life just because they are called and sent by Jesus, the Son of Man.

Would you like to become a disciple of Jesus? Would you like to be sent like our brother Bartholomew was? For we are sent just like he was. By the same Lord, with the same message, to the same hostile world.

But how was it possible? Where did Bartholomew get strength to carry on? Where did others get such strengths? Where do we get strength to carry on as disciples of Jesus? Here - Jesus explains it to us as He speaks to Nathanael.

"Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these." He said to him, "Truly I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

This is it. Jesus promised they would witness something extraordinary. Something great. Now, what comes to mind when we hear about witnessing something incredibly great, a show of God's glory, His self-revelation, what do you imagine?

I guess we may think about seeing some heavenly realities, peeking into the inner workings of the heavenly realm, something out of this world. Something unseen, something that would take our breath away and would inspire us for years to come.

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Is that what Jesus was referring to? No! God's perspective is very different. His thoughts are not our thoughts. Do you know how the Gospel of John describes God's glory, and how Jesus speaks about His glory?

Jesus said: **"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified."** (John 12:23) Do you know, what was He referring to? To His sufferings and crucifixion. For that was where the Triune God revealed His heart, His true nature, in this incredible divine self-sacrifice for the sake of His creation. The cross of Jesus...

That was the most extraordinary revelation of God's glory, of who He truly is, what kind of God He is. He is a God who **"emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."**

That's God true glory, a truly extraordinary revelation of who He is – in His service to us, in His incarnation, in His life among us, in His crucifixion, and now in Him serving us His life-giving gifts that flow from the cross and which He pours on you.

The gift of adoption as His children that you receive in your baptism, and the gift of forgiveness and eternal life that you receive in the Lord's Supper. This is what gave courage, joy and that incredible strength to our brother Bartholomew, to the apostles.

The presence of the Son of Man with them. And you know what, you receive the same strength from the same Lord. Right here in the Divine Service, where our Risen Lord comes to serve you, where He invites you to His marriage feast.

How do we celebrate? How do we say it? Together with... If the fragile curtain of this physical reality was removed, you would see what John the apostles saw - countless multitudes of God's saints, God's mighty angels and archangels, all of them joyfully singing "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord", and the Son of Man Himself serving you the greatest of His gifts, forgiveness and life, from His hands into your mouth.

This is where our brother Bartholomew got His strength, from the God who became man and now the host in His Holy Meal. This is where all the saints through millennia have received their courage and strength to carry on as Jesus' disciples, even if for many of them the cost of that discipleship was their very lives.

These are simple Christian truths that we are reminded of as we remember Bartholomew or Nathanael. For we too are called by the same Lord, yes, each one of you! We too are sent by the same Lord Jesus, yes, each one of you! We too are blessed to receive the divine blessings and strength from the very hands of the One to whom all authority is given in heaven and on earth.

Blessed we are, indeed.

Amen.