

Gospel reflections for Sunday 30th August 2020

This week marks the feast day of St Bartholomew, one of the first disciples to take up the call to follow Jesus. The reading for this day is found in John's gospel 1:43-51, where John refers to him as Nathanael.

Jesus Calls Philip and Nathanael

43 The next day Jesus decided to leave for Galilee. Finding Philip, he said to him, "Follow me."

44 Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. **45** Philip found Nathanael and told him, "We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."

46 "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Nathanael asked. "Come and see," said Philip.

47 When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, "Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."

48 "How do you know me?" Nathanael asked.

Jesus answered, "I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you."

49 Then Nathanael declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel."

50 Jesus said, "You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that."

51 He then added, "Very truly I tell you, you will see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Reflection

John's gospel has a number of firsts. The very beginning of chapter one starts with the words: *In the beginning was the Word*, echoing the first words in Genesis. The first chapter in John also tells how Jesus called his first disciples. This reading from John 1: 43-51 records the first meeting of Jesus and Nathanael (Bartholomew). At this meeting Jesus is acknowledged for the first time as the Son of God - a very significant 'first'. However, this acknowledgement does not happen immediately.

On first hearing about Jesus from Philip, Nathanael's immediate response was 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' This is a pretty harsh call as Nathanael had not yet met Jesus but he had already formed a judgement based purely on his preconceived idea of people from Nazareth. We can never be sure exactly what Nazareth was like in Biblical times but it would seem it's famous for one thing only - it was the home of Jesus of Nazareth.

Nathanael's comments suggest he did not think highly of this small Jewish community overshadowed by larger, more sophisticated Greek settlements. He seems quick to judge but before we are quick to judge him it is worth pausing to think about our own biases. Think of some of the comments that can be overheard in a school staff room. 'If that kid wasn't in my class...' or 'that's not the sort of family we want in our school' or 'I don't know how someone like that got a job here'. Nathanael, like us, is human. I'm sure, even if we have not spoken our biases aloud, we have at the very least thought them. We may even have acted on them.

On meeting Nathanael Jesus announces Nathanael is a person *in whom there is no deceit*. I can't help wondering what Nathanael must have felt when he heard those words after being so disparaging about anyone who came from Nazareth. Did he feel guilty that this man who he had doubted, purely because of his origins, thought so highly of him? Or

as a man of integrity, did he listen and want to know more? Perhaps it was a combination of the two because once he realised that Jesus already knew him (when you were under the fig tree, I saw you) it was Nathanael who was the first to publicly proclaim Jesus for who he really was: 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God. You are the King of Israel!'

Jesus already knows who we are. He recognises us; he knows our biases; he knows our strengths. Even when we feel we are approaching Jesus it is because he has already approached us. When we feel the times he has been present in our lives or in the lives of others, it is because he has always been there, unrecognized, unacknowledged, but still there. When Philip invites Nathanael to 'Come and See' we are all invited to continually share in the presence of Jesus, our Saviour.

A Prayer

Dear Jesus,
So often I come to you with lists of demands. I am consumed by the noise of the world and the busyness of the day. I ask you to clear my senses so I can hear your voice and come and see you. May I learn to listen more and open my heart to your presence in all I say and do. Amen

Song

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