

24. August 2021

**Feast of St. Bartholomew, Apostle**  
**“Recognized by the Lord”**

**Jn 1:45-51**

*'Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found him of whom Moses in the Law and the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth.' Nathanael said to him, 'From Nazareth? Can anything good come from that place?' Philip replied, 'Come and see.' When Jesus saw Nathanael coming he said of him, 'There, truly, is an Israelite in whom there is no deception.' Nathanael asked, 'How do you know me?' Jesus replied, 'Before Philip came to call you, I saw you under the fig tree. 'Nathanael answered, 'Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the king of Israel.' Jesus replied, 'You believe that just because I said: I saw you under the fig tree. You are going to see greater things than that. 'And then he added, 'In all truth I tell you, you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending over the Son of man.'*

“From Nazareth? Can anything good come from that place?” I remember an anecdote in Nazareth: I was talking to a Christian who came from there, and I jokingly said to him: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” He looked at me in surprise and replied: “Yes, Jesus came out of Nazareth”. We might add that Joseph and Mary also lived for a long time in Nazareth, so much blessing has come out of Nazareth! To this day, the inhabitants of this city - among whom there are also Christians - are very kind to the crowds of pilgrims and tourists who come here.

Jesus praises Nathanael with a great compliment: “A true Israelite”. Nathanael, who is traditionally identified with the Apostle Bartholomew, whose feast we celebrate today, is surely a man who earnestly strives to keep the commandments of God, who knows the Word of the Lord, who practises love for his neighbour, and so on.

Now, we might ask ourselves: What would be the characteristics of someone whom Jesus calls a “real Christian”? What would we expect of him?

I think it is easy to list some of his characteristics: A “real Christian” should know the Bible well, receive the sacraments regularly, work on his own heart, so that everything that is not of God fades away. He should have a heart for the poor, have

an authentic prayer life and intercede before God for people. Furthermore, we would expect him to be faithful, to know how to forgive, to recognise his mistakes and try to overcome them, to banish all bitterness from his heart, to act with mercy, to confess his Lord and try to spread the gospel, among many other things?

Actually, it is not difficult to describe a “real Christian”. He would have to be, like Nathanael, a man in whom there is no deceit. His own interests must not come into play, and he should learn to perceive the so-called “coexistences”. By “coexistences” we mean that there may be in us, apart from our conscious intention, also other, more hidden intentions, which are sometimes unconscious or only dimly conscious, but which still pursue their goals. It may be, for example, a very subtle manipulation of the other person.

Let us take a simple example, in a matter that is not really grave: It happens that I want to do a good deed in secret, in order to obey the Lord's counsel (cf. Mt 6:1-4). But once I have done the good deed, I am not able to keep it to myself and I end up saying it, in one way or another, because I happen to seek recognition from people. With this motivation, I am able to manage the conversation in such a way that those who are listening to me can conclude from my comments that I have done this or that. Thus, I am indirectly attracting praise from others.

This is certainly not “deception” or “falsehood”, but neither can we speak of the intention being entirely pure. Now, we could apply this example to many other things, which may be of greater weight. That is why a pure heart is needed, to perceive also hidden or unconscious intentions, allowing the Holy Spirit to purify them.

Then comes the confession of Nathanael: *“Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel”*.

Evidently Jesus had seen Nathanael's heart, and knew what he had thought or prayed about when he was under the fig tree. Nathanael's immediate profession of faith could hardly have resulted from the mere fact that Jesus saw him. It will need to be understood more deeply. By speaking of his *“seeing him under the fig tree”*, one could be indicating that Jesus “knew” Nathanael; while he knew himself to be “recognised” by Jesus. In fact, it is there that the Lord describes him as a “true Israelite”, and Nathanael is identified in these words.

We too, in following Christ, experience that Jesus knows us and we feel recognised by Him. There is no one who knows us as He does, no one who knows our heart as

Jesus does, no one to whom we can open up to the very depths of our being as we can to Him. And it is thanks to the Holy Spirit that we can recognise and confess:  
*“You are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel”.*