

24. August 2023

Feast of St. Bartholomew, Apostle  
Recognized by the Lord

Jn 1:45-51

*Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith to him: We have found him of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus the son of Joseph of Nazareth. And Nathanael said to him: Can anything of good come from Nazareth? Philip saith to him: Come and see. Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him: and he saith of him: Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile. Nathanael saith to him: Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered, and said to him: Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. Nathanael answered him, and said: Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel. Jesus answered, and said to him: Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, thou believest: greater things than these shalt thou see. And he saith to him: Amen, amen I say to you, you shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man.*

“Can anything of good come from Nazareth?” I remember an anecdote in Nazareth: I was talking to a Christian who came from there, and I jokingly said to him: “Can anything of good come from 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 such a person?

I think it is easy to list some of the characteristics: A “real Christian” should know the Bible well, receive the sacraments regularly, work on his or her own heart, so that everything that is not of God fades away. A “real Christian” should have a heart for the poor, have an authentic prayer life and intercede before God for people. Furthermore, we would expect him or her to be faithful, to know how to forgive, to recognise the own mistakes and try to overcome them, to banish all bitterness from the own heart, to act with mercy, to confess the Lord and try to spread the gospel, among many other things.

Actually, it is not difficult to describe a “real Christian”. That person would have to be, like Nathanael, someone in whom there is no deceit. The own interests must not come into play, and he or she 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, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel”*.

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: *“thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel”*.