



Balta Lelija

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FEAST OF SAINT BARTHOLOMEW, THE APOSTLE
“Proclaiming the Gospel Fearlessly”

John 1:45–51

Philip found Nathan'a-el, 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.” Nathan'a-el said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.” Jesus saw Nathan'a-el coming to him, and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!” Nathan'a-el 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.” Nathan'a-el 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 shall 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 upon the Son of man.”

“(A man) in whom is no guile!”—this is high praise from Jesus for Nathanael, who is one and the same person as the Apostle Bartholomew.

The following description is an excerpt from Otto Bitschnau OSB, *The Lives of the Saints of God*, 1881, p. 625 ff.

Bartholomew remained Jesus' faithful companion throughout His entire public ministry and was an eyewitness to His miracles, His suffering, His death, and His resurrection from the tomb; he received the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost along with the other apostles, and was a very zealous preacher of the Holy Gospel. Tradition identifies three great regions as the setting for his apostolic work: India, Phrygia, and Greater Armenia, where, in the city of Albanopolis, not far from the Caspian Sea, he suffered martyrdom for Jesus, his Master, around the year 71.

Bartholomew performed great miracles in that land for the sick and the possessed. When King Polymius heard of this, he summoned the apostle, asking him to heal his daughter, who had to be bound in heavy chains because of her fits of rage. Bartholomew came and, with a short prayer, freed the princess from the evil spirit. The joy over this miracle was extraordinary

throughout the entire city. The overjoyed king wanted to bestow gifts of gold and precious stones upon the apostle, but he refused everything, saying: "It was not a desire for gold and silver that brought me to this land, but a desire to bring happiness to souls; I do not wish for you to give me the treasures of your kingdom, but for you to accept the treasures of the Kingdom of Heaven from me by renouncing idolatry and worshiping the One God of heaven and earth." Then he proclaimed Jesus, the Crucified One, to the entire court, adding: "As proof that your gods are nothing but demons speaking through your lifeless images, let us go into the temple, and I will compel the devil himself to publicly confirm the truth of my words."

The proposal was well received, and the king, accompanied by a very large crowd, went with him to the main temple of the goddess Astaroth. In the name of Jesus, Bartholomew commanded her to confess aloud who she was. With a hideous howl, she confessed: "I am a devil and have deceived the king and his people until now: there is only one God, whom this man proclaims to you."

The pagan priests, seeing their prestige destroyed, were consumed by deadly hatred toward Bartholomew; they sought and found a powerful ally in Astyages, the king's brother, who ruled over part of Armenia. He feigned a desire to learn about Christianity and invited Bartholomew to his court.

When the apostle appeared before him, he furiously ordered him to sacrifice to the gods at once or die. Bartholomew refused, and Astyages commanded that his skin be flayed from his body and only then his head be cut off.

The holy body of the apostle was buried with honor by the Christians; it was later taken to Dora in Mesopotamia, where Emperor Justin built a magnificent church in his honor; during the time of the Saracens, it was taken to Benevento, and Emperor Otto II then brought several of his relics to Rome. St. Bartholomew is venerated especially as the patron saint of sinners; for since he suffered the most cruel and agonizing death of all the martyrs, he exercises the most sublime magnanimity by praying preeminently for the conversion of sinners.

These are some aspects of the Apostle's life.

We can see that the “*Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile*” remained faithful to his calling even unto death. The proclamation of the Gospel goes hand in hand with the expulsion of the idols behind which the demons hide.

This insight is important even today. Neither has the urgency of proclaiming the Gospel—which must be passed on in its entirety—diminished, nor have the idols, and with them the demons, disappeared. However, this awareness seems to be fading even within church circles, as evidenced, for example, by the search for dubious healing methods, the acceptance of esoteric content and practices, or even the receiving of a blessing from a shaman. The grotesque public “Pachamama” spectacle on October 4, 2019, at the Vatican was a crystal-clear indication that the discernment of spirits has been obscured. (<https://en.elijamission.net/blog-post/third-wound-the-pachamama-cult-in-the-vatican/>)

The clarity of the above description—that the Gospel cannot coexist with dark forces—must urgently return to our Church.

What is in accordance with the Gospel and the Catholic faith, and what is not? Where has there been a mixing of ideas?

For example, one cannot simply emphasize the positive values in other religions while overlooking their errors and half-truths; otherwise, a distorted picture emerges.

The uniqueness of the proclamation of the Messiah, the Redeemer of all people, must not be sidelined in favor of a quasi “universal religion” in which all religions appear to be equally willed by God.

May Saint Bartholomew, through his example and intercession, implore for us the courage to proclaim the Gospel without compromise, with wisdom and fearlessness, and may he pray with us for the conversion of sinners!