

Today the Church throughout the world commemorates St. Bartholomew, also known by his friends, some of you as St. Nathaniel. One the 12. His name means, 'gift of God' a "child of bravery, boldness, daring." So he was, by God's grace.

When first told about Jesus by his friend Philip, Bartholomew, scoffed: **Can anything good come out of Nazareth?** Philip challenged him, **Come and see.** He did. Our Lord then promises Bartholomew: **You will see heaven opened, and angels of God ascending, descending on the Son of Man.**

Bartholomew would see the fulfillment of Jacob's ancient vision of the ladder to heaven at the cross. That account of Jacob wrestling with God, vision in Gen. 28; Jacob's word of confession there, **this is none other than the House of God and this is the gate of heaven.** That Scripture verse has adorns chancel areas of churches throughout the ages and world. A place where Christ is truly present; where heaven and earth are joined. Bartholomew would indeed see if anything good was to come out of Nazareth, as the word "Nazareth" written at the top of the cross; the only good man, the only good and truth and love that man has ever known hung there.

St. Luke, today's gospel reminds us of an incident in Church history; not something to be proud of; something very petty; the disciples arguing about greatest. These men -3 years with our Lord, listening to His preaching, teaching, all the miracles, now just had the holy Supper with Him; these hand-picked, founding members of the Apostolic Church, carrying on like little children arguing over who's the best.

But this shouldn't shock us. You do this so often. Constantly measuring yourselves up against others. Why we tear others down, criticize others because we would be greater than them if we were in that position. We see and speak and think ourselves as more right, more good, better than others. Shame on us all!

Now be sure, it's commendable to strive in the workplace, in your vocations, on sportsfield, in schoolwork to be the best you can be; to improve, work hard toward greatness. We certainly want our military and police and your very doctor to be the greatest. That's good, but also realizing in humbleness, all the good things, the great things you do, who actually deserves the credit and praise and thanks for all you've ever accomplishment.

In His loving rebuke, our Lord points out in His kingdom, true greatness is found, not in the praise of the world, but in lowly, humble service. **For who is greater, who sits at the table, or who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves.**

Oh how we want to be served, to be respected, to be loved. But true greatness: wants to serve, to show respect, to act in love. And the greatest greatness found from the cross – the least likely place of all: a place of apparent defeat and loss in death. Yet His greatest triumph where He says He draws all people to Himself.

Tradition teaches Bartholomew went as far as India, eventually martyred for the

faith in Armenia. We don't even know much of him. Long forgotten, seems unimportant. That's how it even works for us in this Kingdom.

It's hard, so hard to believe, understand that God's love for you is not proven in wealth and privilege, in success, your dreams coming true; in you becoming great or even good, or even above average. God's love for you is proved in His promises fulfilled: Jesus on the cross, resurrected, reigning. His greatness in washing you, feeding you, forgiving you. His love proved in the quiet things in which He has embedded in His promise: words, bread, wine, water, in jars of clay, even with faulty, egotistical pastors.

There is temptation to search for greatness where it can be measured and approved in the sight of men. We want to make the gospel work, to earn something for being good; earn more from God when we do good; that we can make life work, our homes better, family never fights, to get knowable answers to prayers, to build something of ourselves here and now that the world will recognize. But that is to abandon the Gospel.

For there is a kingdom the world does not know. It lives in you. A Kingdom ruled through forgiveness and grace, the kingdom of dying and rising. His dying and rising is acted out in you. And you live by faith and trust that no matter what, no matter what, all things will be good for you, for your good, only because of this. He is good and His mercy and steadfast love endures forever and you are His. It will be okay, even good for you now. There is a feast and kingdom awaiting in heaven and even now you partake this feast and a kingdom here, hidden from the eyes and wisdom of men. You're the honored guest to recline at His table, that He would serve the likes of you.

Is there anything greater for you than the forgiveness of all your sins, life and salvation, eternal communion. He unites you to Himself, to the saints beside you, who came before you, and after you yet unborn, to saints all over this sad world, and to Bartholomew and saints and martyrs and loved ones you know, at rest, who sing with angels and you this very day; just as you are holy, His beloved dear saint.

And while this passage begins with an embarrassing squabble about greatest, it concludes with our Lord promising greatness to all of you who reside in His kingdom –neither earned nor deserved; yet even today you are given greatness of His Kingdom.

Live intentionally the life you've been given here. As Bartholomew's name means, for you, a gift of God, a child of bravery, boldness, daring. Do not waste the day in foolishness. Return to the Lord, to the Apostles, to their preaching and writing in the New Testament and to the Scriptures of the prophets which they quote and expound. Follow the fiery example of their faith. Love what they believed. Receive what they taught with joy.