

LOCKDOWN DAY 151 – 24 AUGUST 2020

Feast of St Bartholomew

Molweni dear family and friends of False Bay Diocese,

Scripture: John 1:45-51

Hymn: *O Lord You Are the Centre of my life*

It is a new day, it is a new week. We have fresh hope, fresh blessings. God is our companion. The dawning of a new day and week is blessed by God.

Over the weekend we celebrated the 200th birthday of the Bible Society. The Bible is available in the eleven official languages of our country, also in braille for the visually impaired, a copy for the deaf and digitally. As part of the birthday celebrations, churches are asked to celebrate 2020 as the Year of the Bible.

The future of the church depends on Theological Education. Yesterday, we celebrated Theological Education Sunday.

Today, our public schools reopen for more grades.

In all of this, the church is a lifeline and sustains us. As the inner band of Christians, let us reflect on how we are being invited to eagerly follow Jesus? We reflect on the Christian qualities of St Bartholomew, who is thought to be the same person as Nathanael in today's gospel text. As Jesus knew Bartholomew through and through, he also knows us through and through. We share our own excitement and invite others to follow Jesus and Jesus will do the rest.

A certain fact that we know, is that Bartholomew was one of the Twelve Apostles of Jesus. He has been identified with Nathanael who appears in John's gospel as being introduced to Christ by Philip although some modern commentators reject the identification of Nathanael with Bartholomew. Because Bartholomew was a man "*in whom there was no guile,*" his mind was open to the truth. He went willingly with Philip to see Christ and recognised the Saviour immediately as the Son of God. He preached the gospel in Asia Minor and Greater Armenia.

The Synoptic Evangelists Matthew, Mark and Luke list Bartholomew along with the other Apostles. He was from Cana and was closely associated with the other Apostles after the Lord's resurrection (Jn 21:1-14). Experts are of the opinion that he is probably the same person as Nathanael (gift of God) whom the Lord declared as a true Israelite in whom there was no guile and who in turn was the first to declare the identity of Jesus, saying "*You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel.*" St John mentions Nathanael among the Apostles, while he leaves out the name of Bartholomew. It is therefore **likely** that both names belong to the same person. In Aramaic, Bartholomew means "*son of Talmi*" (son of the farmer). Therefore, this could have been his family name, while Nathanael could have been his personal name.

It is **unlikely** that he who was among the earliest disciples of Jesus would be left out totally by the first three Evangelists, nor is it **likely** that St John leaves him out. Besides, in the Synoptics Bartholomew is associated with Philip; similarly, in John, Nathanael is associated with Philip. We see in John. 1:45-46 that Philip brings Nathanael to Jesus while in the Synoptics that Bartholomew is mentioned with Philip.

When Philip told Nathanael of having found Jesus of Nazareth about whom Moses and the prophets wrote, Nathanael was rather sceptical, "*Can anything good come from Nazareth?*" Nazareth is an obscure village never mentioned in the Old Testament. Being a man without double dealing, he openly expresses his doubt. Perhaps he was influenced by the rivalry between the two villages Cana and Nazareth.

All the same, he willingly accepted the invitation of Philip to "*Come and see.*" When Jesus greeted him with words of appreciation, he still had a doubt, "*How do you know me?*" Nathanael was a true Israelite.

Unlike the Jews who had closed their minds to Jesus, he was searching for the truth, and he found Jesus the Truth. Jesus appreciated his sincerity and promised him more of truth, a greater revelation of the Son of Man. What his great patriarch Jacob could only dream (Gen 28:12), this Israelite is going to see in reality. He is going to behold the Son of man when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels (Mk 8:38).

Like the other Apostles, Bartholomew too was privileged to live and move with the Lord Jesus, to hear his teaching, to witness his miracles and be trained by him. He loved the Lord, worked miracles in his name, preached, lived and died for him. Now he also shares in the glory of the exalted Lord. According to various traditions, Apostle Bartholomew worked and preached in different countries. According to Eusebius he preached the gospel in western India (around the Kaylan region near Mumbai) and was martyred there. According to Rufinus he preached in Ethiopia. Some say he preached in what is today called Yemen. Similarly, several other places also claim to have had the Apostle as missionary.

Another tradition, a stronger one, says that he laboured in Greater Armenia. There is a belief that in Armenia, Bartholomew converted King Polymnius, his Queen and twelve entire cities to Christianity. Therefore, the priests of that nation hated him and instigated Astyages, the King's brother, to punish and kill the Apostle in the cruellest manner. The tradition of the Church is that he was martyred by being flayed alive. He remains the patron saint of Armenia today.

By order of Emperor Otto III in 986 the relics of Bartholomew were brought to Rome and today they are venerated in the church of St Bartholomew-on-Tiber. From the year 1238, the Apostle's skull is preserved and honoured in Frankfurt, Germany,

The message of Christ that he preached was offensive and foolish to the Gentiles. They persecuted him and put him to death but in all his afflictions he remained faithful to the Lord who loved him and chose him. He willingly suffered and died for his Lord. Bartholomew is one of the unshakable foundation stones on which the Church of Christ is built. The Feast of St Bartholomew reminds us that we should remain faithful to Christ, no matter what challenges and threats we may have to face.

The gospel text teaches us not to be overshadowed by humble beginnings. *"Can anything good come from Nazareth?"* The small village with a population then of about four hundred people and just about two thousand feet from east to west and six hundred and fifty feet from north to south seems to have been looked down with some contempt in first century Palestine. It had no importance, no good reputation, no prophet came from Nazareth. Yet it was from Nazareth that Mary and Joseph came. From Nazareth came Jesus the Nazarene. God's choices at times baffle us. God's ways are not our ways. We need never write persons off on the basis of location, language, colour, age, gender, class, culture, sexual orientation.

Today, please **reach out** to any person named Bartholomew, Nathanael or Philip. Also reach out to anyone studying theology and those going back to school today. Jesus sees their potential.

We pray for all places of learning involved with theological education and school pupil tuition. We pray for the Bible Society. Proverbs 23:12 reminds us to apply our hearts to instruction and ears to words of knowledge. We pray that caregivers, parents, godparents and grandparents will practice this passage and influence children positively so that they may not live shallow lives and be enabled in their turn, to bring their friends to faith. God, our Trusted Guide, our Mentor, Inspiration, our Home of good choices and decisions, help us to gather your wisdom around us to make careful choices and use our energy positively. Place your discerning touch on our minds so that we will think clearly. **Amen.**

I am, Because we Are, Because God is.....Opening hearts to heal God's world. *Happy Monday!*