

Let the words of mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable in thy sight, oh Lord my strength and my redeemer

Today's Second Lesson is about evangelism. It is the story of one man (two actually, but I'll speak mostly about Nathaniel) who came to faith in Christ through the efforts of a friend. That's the primary way in which the Gospel has always been spread. Sure, there are great evangelists like Billy Graham who reach thousands of people at a time with the good news of the Kingdom. **But** even then, it takes the work of many people bringing their friends into the stadium to hear the word. That's basically what Phillip did. He invited his friend to come and see for himself what Philip was so excited about. Notice what Phillip said:

“We have found him of whom Moses and the prophets wrote.”
He does not say, “I have found him.” He says, “We have found him.”

I think this is important, because Philip was not speaking for himself only. He was speaking on behalf of (and as a part of) the Church. He was offering the experience of a still very tiny community of believers, and he was inviting his friend to investigate what that community experienced.

And, now we are part of that community, that same Church. When, we participate in the liturgy, say the creeds, or partake of the Eucharistic feast, we place ourselves in the company of millions who have confessed this faith throughout the ages in every language all over the world, and millions more who are confessing today even as we speak. You and I are not alone – we are never alone – when we confess the Faith of the Church. We do well to remember that, and take confidence in it, when **we** speak to someone about Jesus.

Nathaniel's reaction was negative: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” I can hear him in our vernacular – “Yeah right, Phil.” Well, before I get to Phillip's way of responding to that cynical attitude, let me speculate on what may have been behind it. Nathaniel lived near Nazareth, and his experiences with that town apparently hadn't been especially pleasant. **Maybe** he found the people inhospitable. Maybe they were too preoccupied with their own petty agendas to think about, much less talk about, the great issues of life. Maybe they were so suspicious of anything unfamiliar that an inquisitive person like Nathaniel simply found them boring. In any event, Nazareth did not seem like the kind of place that would produce a Messiah for Israel.

Our Lord Himself had a negative experience in Nazareth. Listen to this passage from St. Mark's Gospel:

“And on the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue and many who heard him were astonished saying, ‘Where did this man get all this? What is the wisdom given to him? What mighty works are wrought by his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?’ And they took offense at him.

And Jesus said to them, ‘A prophet is not without honor, except in his own country and among his own kin, and in his own house.’

And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them. And he marveled because of their unbelief.”

And so also today, like Nathaniel, there are many people who have had bad experiences that have left them cynical; maybe they've had bad experiences with particular churches or particular clergy, or particular theologies. It generally doesn't help to argue with such people or to try to talk them out of their prejudices. Now, I'm not saying in any way that we should avoid dialog, clearly, this is how Phillip began his conversation with Nathaniel, as well as Andrew's previous conversation with Simon Peter. Further, as the same Peter wrote later, we should be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh a reason for the hope that is in us. But, when the dialog ends, which we should be prepared, may very well be with a skeptical comment. The thing to do is exactly what Philip did. He said, “Come and see.” That's the heart of the matter. That's how successful evangelism works.

Yes, it's unlikely that we will argue people into anything or out of anything; but what if we invite them to share the experience of meeting Christ personally? What if we invite them to the place where we have met Him and where we continue to meet Him, which is right **here**.

Now, I have to insert a word of caution. We need to be very sure that what we are inviting people to come and see is indeed the Christ. No building, however beautiful and historic, can bring about salvation. No music, however inspiring and uplifting, can forgive sins or overcome death. No preacher, even if learned or eloquent, can talk anyone into a state of grace. A parish may have popular programs and some friendly, interesting people, but these can't restore the distorted image of God in us. Only Christ has the power do that, and ultimately, **He** is what we have to offer. The best place to meet Christ is in the fellowship of His body, the Church. Here, Christ comes to us in the Sacraments and in the word truly proclaimed and taught. Music and liturgy and art and architecture play their part by

pointing to Christ and helping us approach Him. But let none of those vehicles become an end in itself. When we say, “Come and see”, we should recognize that it is Christ Himself who must be seen.

You see, it was not really Phillip who brought his friend to faith. It was Jesus Himself. When Jesus confronted Nathaniel, He read his heart and his character and his aspirations so perfectly that Nathaniel was convinced he had at last found a man he could follow. That was the start. But Jesus promised to lead him much deeper than that. He likened himself to Jacob’s ladder on whom the angels ascended and descended, Jesus carrying God’s word to the world and carrying the prayers of the faithful to the Father. He declared Himself to be the link between heaven and earth, the way to the Father, the great Mediator between God and man.

Perhaps you have heard of the Celtic concept of “thin places?” I’m generally very skeptical about these sort of things, but I am intrigued and excited by descriptions of these locations where it’s said that heaven and earth intersect, and time and eternity embrace. Supposedly, you can stand right on the edge, on the very doorstep to heaven. I don’t know if it’s true? Is it possible there are geographical locations that are especially blessed in this way? Could they perhaps be like where Moses encountered Yahweh in the burning bush? Or, maybe it’s that these places simply invoke emotional experience in pilgrims and tourists. I don’t know, but when I hear or read about such a place, I want to go and see! Possibly get a taste of what it will be like when our prayer is answered and His Kingdom does come in full! And yet, the thing is, there is such a thin place. A foretaste of the Kingdom of Heaven, A great link between heaven and earth. A place we know. That place where we approach Jacob’s ladder, hear the words of God, and commune together with Christ. Yes, right here at the altar!

So, the question we must ask is this: While we know that Christ is present, what will the uninitiated see when they come among us? Will they see Jesus at work in our midst? Will people see a difference between life among us and life in the secular world? Will they see this Jesus in our relationships with each other – will they know us by our love? Will they see Him in our devotion to prayer and the breaking of bread and the teaching of the Apostles? Will they see Him in our willingness to sacrifice personal comfort for the sake of others? Will they see Him in our humility and our obedience and our discipline and our priorities and the way we make decisions? Will they see that it is through Him that we perceive the will of God and offer our prayers to the Father?

Conclusion:

We must be on our guard, evaluating ourselves, our attitudes, relationships, and priorities. For, if personal agendas and rivalries are allowed to flourish; if pride and self-centeredness are unopposed among us; if immorality and self-indulgence are accepted as normal; if gossip is tolerated, it may be difficult to perceive Christ through the haze.

And, while we know that the Almighty God is more powerful than our actions, and is in the process of restoring us even when we are at our worst, it's evident that many people are turned off by 'church.' Perhaps rightly so, when they view hypocrisy or sense an attitude of smug superiority, but if instead they see that we acknowledge our sins and are struggling to amend them, then they **will** see Christ - at work in us. They, along with us will have the opportunity to experience the forgiveness, love, and hope found in the Gospel.

Jesus does not expect us to do for people what only He can do. But he does expect (even command) us to do what Philip did. To bring people into His presence. He expects us to testify as Philip did to Nathaniel: "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote." And when the reply comes back, "Yeah, right Phil - Can anything good come out of Nazareth?", or more to our culture, "Can anything good come out of the church, out of religion, out of fundamentalism?" we have to be ready with confidence, the confidence that can come with of being in the company of millions of Christians stretching back over the centuries, and more importantly the confidence that comes of knowing that Christ **is** present in our midst, with that confidence we can say "Come and see."

To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your father which is in heaven.

*Offering - Get the plate
After replacing the plate*

Let us Pray