



SUNDAY OF ORTHODOXY

March 24

THE GOSPEL READING

John 1:43-51

[The Baptist's Disciples Follow Jesus]

At that time, Jesus decided to go to Galilee. And he found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip found Nathanael, and he 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." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see."

Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" Nathanael 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." Nathanael 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."

THE SERMON

The Son of God took on human flesh for our salvation and entered the world to redeem it. Following Christ's temptations in the wilderness, He begins His public ministry



and presents Himself to John the Baptist (the Forerunner) to be baptized. John said of Christ, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!" Two brothers Andrew and Peter, who were disciples of John, followed Jesus in response to John's testimony. These disciples became eyewitnesses of the Glory of the Messiah, Who was revealing Himself. He said to them, "Come and see!" Jesus gathered His disciples, calling their friends and families to tell them about Christ. Jesus finds Philip and says to him, "Follow me." This is a simple yet powerful invitation. Following Christ means putting Him at the center of our lives. This invitation to become His disciple is also personally addressed to each one of us.

When we soften our hearts to God and realize He calls us to be with Him daily, we naturally respond in love. The Lord comes to us as unique individuals with full knowledge of who we are, where we come from, and everything that relates to us as human beings. His invitation opens the door for us to respond to His grace. Philip responds positively and follows Christ. Eventually, he becomes the Holy Apostle Philip, one of the Twelve, who devotes his entire life to serving Christ and is ultimately crowned with martyrdom. When we respond to the Lord's call to follow Him, He will lead us to live full and meaningful lives as we live for Him and bear lasting fruit both in our own lives and in the lives of others.

After responding to the call, Philip finds Nathanael and tells him he has seen the Messiah about Whom the Law and the Prophets had spoken. The grace of God opens Philip's heart to reveal Jesus's true identity: He is the prophesied Messiah Who came to save the world. Philip overflows with joy and invites Nathanael to join him. Nathanael wonders how the Messiah can come from a little-known town like Nazareth.

Philip then repeats the words of the Lord: "Come and see!" Jesus sees Nathanael coming to Him, and He says of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" Nathanael's heart did not have any deceit. Because he was open to God, God the Son revealed Himself to him. Nathanael, stunned by Christ's response, asks, "How do you know me?" Jesus answers, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

The encounter could not be more intimate and personal. The Lord knows everything about us. He sees us and longs to be with us, even when we falsely assume we are alone and forgotten. He is always with us. Saint John Chrysostom says, "Do you see how his soul is filled at once with exceeding joy and embraces Jesus with words? ... How he leaps and dances with delight? So, ought we also to rejoice, who have been thought worthy to know the Son of God."

Jesus answers Nathanael that he would see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man. In the Old Testament Book of Genesis, we read that the Patriarch Jacob dreams of a ladder connecting earth to heaven, upon which the angels were ascending and descending (Genesis 28:12-15). Jesus is this Ladder

as He unites in His Person both divine and human natures. Christ is speaking of His mission to provide the missing link for humanity, recombine earth and heaven, and reconnect heaven to earth, as it was in the beginning. Christ *is* the Ladder before us upon which we are all called to climb.

Everything we do in the Church revolves around this ascension of man to God, which was enabled by God taking on flesh and descending from heaven to the world. He descended for us to ascend. In this way, Nathanael beholds the God-Man in the fullness of His purpose. As the disciple embarks on a life of discipleship, he will see greater things than what he just saw. Eventually, Nathanael would see the Lord ascending into heaven, revealing His glory to all people.

Nathanael and Philip encounter Jesus personally. In His love, He calls them to follow Him. By opening their hearts to Him, they respond positively to the call. This changes their lives forever. The words “follow me” are received by them as the Word of God, He Whose identity they recognize, as the sheep recognize the voice of the Shepherd. This is also true of us. Christ is the center of our faith. Like Philip and Nathanael, we are encouraged to open ourselves to Who He is and what He came to do. He is fully God and fully Man. He is the Messiah, the Christ. He is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, Who has no beginning and no end.

Christ comes to us in love, taking up human nature to unite us forever to God. The unity of the divine and human natures of Christ is expressed dogmatically in the Creed we recite at every Divine Liturgy when we affirm that, He is the “one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all ages; Light of Light, true God of true God, begotten, not created, of one essence with the Father through Whom all things were made. Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man.”

The divine light of Christ illumines Philip and Nathanael. Desiring the same illumination, we pray in the Liturgy, “For You, Christ our God, are the illumination of our souls and bodies, and to You, we offer up glory, together with Your Father, Who is without beginning, and Your all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages.”

Christ calls to us personally. It is up to us to respond to His call and witness His presence in the world, just like Philip and Nathanael did. When we decide to come and see and then invite others to do the same, we begin to be transfigured into living icons of Christ. God has given us icons as windows of heaven, and He makes *us* icons to shine the glory of Christ. We become windows of heaven to the world through our prayers, our lives, our love, and our care for others.

As we commemorate this Sunday of Orthodoxy, we reaffirm the significance of icons for our faith. In the Church, one can find many holy images depicting Christ, the Virgin Mary, the angels, or the saints. Although icons are created by molding earthly materials, they can be venerated because God took on human flesh and entered the material

world. We venerate icons but worship only God. We also venerate the image of God in every human being.

May we continue our journey to Pascha (Easter) by responding to His call in our lives. May we open ourselves to Christ and receive His Body and Blood, which was shed for us to bring us back to His Kingdom. In this way, we make the Kingdom of God present in the world, available to all people, for the salvation of their souls and the glory of God, now and forever.