

"Follow Me"

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be pleasing to You, O Lord our God.

"Follow me." This is how Jesus called his disciples. In the passage just before today's Gospel lesson, John the Baptist points to Jesus and tells his own disciples, this is the One, this is the Lamb of God. He pointed them to Jesus. Two of them leave the Baptist and go after Jesus. Jesus turns around and asks them, "What are you seeking?" And they answer, "Rabbi, where do you stay?" He answered, "Come and see".

Following Jesus is staying with Jesus, sticking with Jesus, walking with Jesus wherever He goes. That's what a disciple does, then and now. Wherever the Rabbi goes, the disciple follows. Whatever the Rabbi does, he does with Him.

Jesus made disciples, and said to make disciples, not converts, people who follow Jesus, not just people who profess the faith. Being a disciple is not just intellectually agreeing with certain theological truths, but following Jesus every day. But this is what most of us, the modern Western church, reduced Christianity to: "Sunday morning Christianity". A disciple worships God not only hour on Sunday morning, but every hour of every day.

Isn't that what Saint Paul says? (Romans 12:1) "I appeal to you therefore, brothers (and sisters), by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship."

So, what is worship according to Saint Paul in this verse? It is the presenting of your body, which represents your whole being, as a living sacrifice, every day following Jesus wherever He leads, obeying His commandments, and doing His work. So, all that happened in Judea where John was baptizing. And then today's Gospel starts with this verse:

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Phillip and said to him, "Follow me." And we would think, because we can read that in a few minutes, that the events happened in one morning or in one afternoon. In this passage particularly, we have to allow for an 85-mile journey on foot from Judea to Galilee. Most of the time the Bible gives us a synopsis, a summary of conversations and events.

So, now we're in Galilee. First, Jesus finds Phillip and calls him to follow. John, the author of today's Gospel, does not tell us how much time Phillip spent with Jesus. But we can read between the lines that it was enough time to convince a Jewish man that Jesus was the Messiah of whom Moses and the prophets spoke. That's what Phillip told Nathanael about Jesus later. We don't know what kind of questions Phillip had asked Jesus and what discussion they had, but apparently Jesus opened the scriptures (the Old Testament scriptures, that is) before Phillip and showed him how His life, Jesus' life, so far fulfilled tens of the Old Testament prophecies, and the rest will unfold

in the near future.

Phillip takes these revelations and insights to Nathanael. Again, we don't know how much time Phillip spent with Nathanael. But again we can safely assume that it took him some time to convey the understanding he's got from Jesus to his friend. And Nathanael was fine with everything Phillip said, until he said, "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

How can a very great person, the Messiah, come from a very humble, insignificant town like Nazareth. Some archaeologists think it had a population of a couple of hundred people. So there are probably more people in my apartment building than lived in Nazareth at the time of Jesus.

"Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Phillip said to him, "Come and see." These are the same words Jesus said to the other two disciples earlier in this chapter. The same words the Samaritan woman said to the people of her city, "Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did."

That's evangelism. Disciple Making 101. Pointing people to Jesus, like the Baptist. Taking people to see Jesus. Take them to Jesus. Take them to Jesus of the scriptures. Share the word of God with them. Take them to Jesus of your life.

People can argue theology all day long, but no one can argue your testimony, your story, what Jesus did to you. No one can argue your hope. They will ask you for the reason of your hope, giving you the opportunity to share Jesus with them. The only Gospel some people will get is the Gospel according to you. The Gospel lived out in your life. The Gospel you will share with them.

A homeless demoniac healed by Jesus wanted to follow Him. Jesus told him, "Go home to your friends and tell them how much the LORD has done for you and how He had mercy on you." The Gospel of Mark tells us, "And he went away and began to proclaim in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him, and everyone would marvel. (Mark 5:19-20)

So what do we have here? Decapolis, *theka* in Greek, means 10, polis means city; 10 cities. One person whose life was completely messed up, with no theological training, was able to proclaim the Gospel to 10 cities just by his testimony. That is what God has done to me. This is how he changed my life. Take them to Jesus.

This is, brothers and sisters, how the kingdom advances. This is how the family of God grows. One soul at a time. The Baptist pointed two of his disciples to Jesus. Andrew brought his brother Peter to Jesus. Phillip brought his friend Nathanael to Jesus. One disciple who makes another disciple, who makes another disciple. "Go and make disciples" said Jesus "of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19)

Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" A true God-fearing Jew, Jesus meant. Nathanael said to him, "How do you know me?" Jesus answered him, "Before Phillip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you."

So, what exactly is Jesus saying here? Jesus disclosed information that He wouldn't naturally have access to, which revealed His supernatural ability to see, to know stuff.

Nathanael answered him, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!" So when Nathanael says, "You are the Son of God," this is a Semitic Aramaic way to say you are the same nature of. So we have, for example, James and John, the sons of thunder, because they are angry and furious like thunder.

So, Nathanael is saying you are the Son of God (of same nature with God). He is not saying you are a king of Israel, or the next king of Israel. He is saying You the King of Israel, the long-awaited Messiah, the son from David the king, who will sit on His throne and reign forever.

Jesus recognized Nathanael as a true Israelite, a truly God-fearing, God-serving Jew. Also a man who knows his Bible. So Jesus answered him, "Because I said to you, 'I saw you under the fig tree,' do you believe? You will see greater things than these. Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

That should ring a bell for a Jew who knows his Bible.

(Genesis 28) Jacob, the great-great-great-great-great-grandfather of Nathanael, fleeing the wrath of his brother Esau after he cheated him of his birthright (he was heading to his uncle Laban), came to a certain place and stayed there that night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of that place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place to sleep. And he had a dream. He dreamt dreams. And behold, there was a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven. And behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it, on the ladder!

Nathanael, you're right. I am the son of God. I am the king of Israel. And I am that dream. I am that ladder. I am the One, the only One, who connects heaven to earth. I am the One who brings the kingdom of heaven to earth, and the angel hosts of heaven to come and administer God's mercy and grace on earth.

(Genesis 28:13-14) And behold, in this dream, the LORD stood above it and said, "I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.

That's the same promise God gave to Abraham his grandfather, and repeated to Isaac

his father, and now to Jacob. "In your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

Paul develops that for us in Galatians and says that the Hebrew word "offspring" is singular, not plural, and it speaks of one person whose name is Jesus.

(Galatians 3:16) Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say "and to offsprings," referring to many, but referring to one, "and to your offspring" who is Christ, says Saint Paul.

I am that promised offspring, in whom all the families of the earth will be blessed. Yes, Nathanael, and yes, Redeemer Huntington Beach, Jesus is the promised Son of David, Son of Abraham, who came to be the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The One who sacrificed His life so that you, believing in Him, shall not perish but have eternal life. The one who hung on a cross, bearing your sins in His body, taking your punishment and your judgment upon Himself so that, believing in Him, you receive forgiveness for your sins, no matter how big or how many. The One who rose again to reconcile you with God and adopt you into His family as His child. Believe in Him. Trust Him with your life and eternity.

Back to Jacob's dream:

(Genesis 28:15) "Behold, I am with you," says the Lord who appeared to Jacob on the ladder, "I am with you. I will keep you wherever you go. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

The boss is on your case. Jesus is committed to your success. He will not leave you until the good plan He has for your life is fulfilled. Can you think of anyone else worth following?

Jesus the promise keeper, who rescues, saves, forgives, Jesus who empowers you, who baptizes you with the Holy Spirit, and who walks with you, is the One who is calling and saying, "Follow Me." Will you?

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.