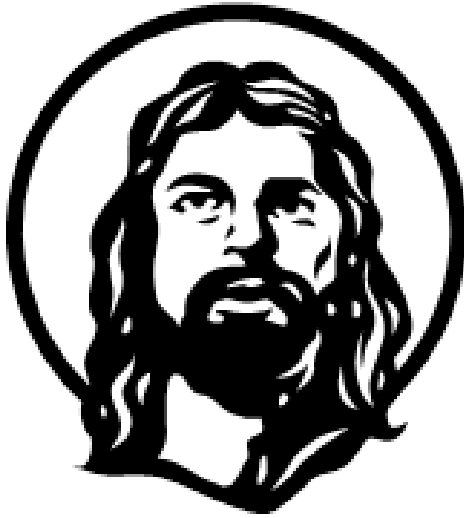


Bringing your Friends to Jesus



Have you tried recently to bring someone to Jesus? I know that I have—often—and despite my teaching and arguments that I use, it rarely seems to work. Perhaps that's just me, or I need more practise.

Well, this morning, in the Gospel that we just heard, Philip sets out to bring Nathaniel to Jesus. And in doing so, Philip provides some lessons for us today.

Philip has just been attracted to Jesus, who is gathering men to be His disciples. He has listened to Jesus, stayed with him, shared ideas with Him, and the next morning Philip sets out to bring his friend Nathaniel to Jesus

[As a side issue, Nathaniel seems to be the same person as Bartholomew—the name Bartholomew actually means Son of Tolmai, since the Hebrew word “Bar” means “Son of.” So, people would have called him by his first name “Nathaniel” or used the last name (Bar-Tolmai = Bartholomew in English). In those days, some people preferred to use his dad's name—putting “son of” in front of his dad's name. You see the same thing with Scottish names—Robert McDonald actually means, “Robert son of Donald.” In English usage, we might say “Robert Donaldson.” In the New Testament, we see this often—i.e., Barabbas, Barnabas, Barjoseph.]

Philip finds his friend Nathaniel and tells him He has just met Jesus of Nazareth and he believes he has found the Messiah. Nathaniel asks cynically: Can anything good come out of Nazareth? It's a typical comment of the day.

However, Philip does not argue with him. He does not give him facts or Bible verses—Philip simply says: “Come and see.”

It's so simple, and yet so right. It leaves the decision up to Nathaniel. If Nathaniel will come, he can see for himself. No arguments, no quoting of scripture, nothing—just: “Come and See.”

And Nathaniel does, and Jesus looks at him and says to him, “I saw you under the fig tree.” In other words, Jesus is saying—you are a man who has been spending time in meditation and thought. And I can tell you, Nathaniel, if you join my band of disciples, you will see the Angels of God “ascending and descending on the Son of Man.”

Nathaniel understood that image immediately, and his eyes would have opened wide. Centuries before, Jacob had gone to sleep at night, and he dreamt of a Ladder connecting earth and Heaven with angels going up and down on it. He awoke with a start, saying: “This place is Holy, it must be a House of God.” He named it Bethel (which means House of God.) And now here is Jesus saying that **He** is a Ladder that connects earth and

Heaven. What a fantastic thing to say—but Nathaniel is convinced. And he stays, realizing that Jesus may be the Messiah he has dreamt of, and has wanted with all his heart.

Have you brought any of your friends to Christ? Have you tried and failed? I know I have. Well, you and I can take a lesson from Philip. Here's what I have learned.

First, Pray about it. Pray for your friend and keep doing so every day. Hold your friend up to the Lord, asking for His Blessing on him/her, asking for an opening for you to make an invitation.

Second, Invite the person to come along with you to Church, or to a Study Group, or whatever would interest them. Don't ever tell your friend that they "should go to Church." Instead Invite them to come with you. No arguments, no scripture quotes, nothing other than a simple Invitation. And if the first invitation doesn't work, do it again, and do it in love.

Third, Allow your friend to talk about what he heard and saw. Don't be critical or defensive, just listen. And invite them again to be come you. As you do, they will see for themselves, they will make up their own mind. And you can quietly rejoice that one more person has discovered Jesus as Saviour and Lord.

In the Cursillo Movement, this is summarized as: 'Make a friend, be a friend, bring a friend to Christ.' In other words, you need to be a friend, to listen, to care, to love, so that your friend can see in you a picture of Jesus loving him.

Now, imagine that you had just brought a new car. It sits in your driveway, all shiny and polished. And your neighbour comes over to see it. I can imagine that you talk about it, and tell him how nice it is, and show him what you like about it. BUT you would never tell your neighbour that he should get one too. You might invite them for a drive, but you don't try to SELL them a car. Absolutely not. So, it is the same with Bringing Someone to Christ. Share what you know, listen more than you talk, answer questions, and invite. But never push, never argue, never try to sell the Lord, never tell someone what they "should do." That's the fastest way to turn someone off.

Today we are sharing in the mass (the Eucharist). When you come up to the Altar to receive the Body and Blood of Christ, He will be there to give you His Grace—to strengthen you to witness for Him. The Spiritual Gift of Evangelism is already alive in this parish, and amongst you. So come to the Altar today open to receive His Grace, so that filled with His Grace, you can go out to make a difference. Be a Philip among your friends—and bring a friend to Christ. It will be the greatest gift that you can ever give them.

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