St. Bart(2025-14)

**ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

 Today, instead of hearing the lessons for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity, we commemorate the Apostle St. Bartholomew. Feasts of Apostles along with feasts of our Lord or of Mary, such as the Transfiguration or the Purification, and a few others, take precedence on our calendar to most Green Sundays.

 Of surprise to no one, we can be certain that Bartholomew was Jewish since his name means "son of Tholmai". His family line went back to the King of Gessur whose daughter was a wife of King David.

 Bartholomew was almost certainly not the Apostle's first name but family name. In the Gospel of St. John he is listed as "Nathanael". He was brought to Jesus by a close friend of his from the same town of Bethsaida, Phillip the Apostle.

 Bartholomew is not mentioned in the Gospels beyond this moment of his calling when Jesus refers to him as being "a Jew without guile", without cunning or deceit. But he might best be remembered for his comment displaying disdain for Jesus' hometown. When Phillip declares that they have **found** the Messiah and that he comes from Nazareth Nathanael retorts: "can anything good come out of Nazareth?"

 After the Apostles split up to spread the Gospel Bartholomew ended up, although there is no certainty, preaching in Persia, Mesopotamia, and Armenia. Legend has it that he was martyred in Albanopolis in Armenia for having converted Polymius the king of Armenia. Traditions has that he was first flayed alive and then crucified upside down. In most icons and depictions, including until recently the website for our Seattle parish of St. Bartholomew, he is depicted holding his skin and some very sharp knives. His relics are said to be in the church of St. Bartholomew-in-the-island, in Rome.

*"BY the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people... Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them."*

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 Asking for prayers for one soon to be ordained is not uncommom, and part of the reason for the seasonal ember-day liturgies inour PB. This is because the devil is displeased with folks getting ordained and starts letting them know it.

 Family or personal crises emerge out of nowhere. Sudden health issues, problems at work or with children or siblings surface causing stress and increasing strife. All of this is brush-back to prevent someone, not just Ordinards, from getting closer to the Lord and more active in ones faith.

 This is because priests and laity form the Church which is the Body of Christ present since his physical Ascension twenty centuries back. But it is especially true with those approaching the priesthood since Christ's Church on earth needs them to continue dispensing His Sacraments. The earth is occupied territory, and the devil loathes anyone trying to push him out of any corner of it.

 Besides trying to wear out one and away from becoming a better disciple, the devil as the father of lies tries to cloud ones judgment. This occurs to all believers, and is a tactic the devil uses in society at large to hinder the Church's advance on his turf. One of the biggest lies, and most successful, is to get people to question whether the Church really is useful these days. Not surprisingly, almost anything can be turned onto its head to lure folks of weak or no faith to think that Christianity is just a bunch of hooey.

 For example, folks back in Gospel times lived in an age of miracles. During Jesus' life many were cured instantly; the same occurred, as we just heard, later with his apostles. St. Paul had his first great success in winning converts in Lystra after he publicly asked a man crippled from birth to stand up and walk.

 How come we don't see such cures today is a frequent query in modern society? Why don't we hear about folks immediately receiving their hearing or sight after a house-call by their pastor? Why was this widespread back then but not today? Sure Jesus could do it, but that ended way back when! Maybe God no longer cares or is just being mean to modern man.

 Reality is that dramatic miraculous cures do in fact occur, and not just occasionally at Lourdes, France. Clergy, Anglican or Roman, frequently report immediate cures in places where the Gospel is arriving for the first time, such as in witch-doctor lands of Africa. It is as if the Lord knows there is a competition going on. To beat the witch-doctor He has to display some raw power at the outset, along the lines of Elijah calling down fire upon his intentionally soaked altar in a battle at Mt. Carmel with Baal worshipers.

 After the outset, after the Gospel is no longer new, dramatic cures begin to recede as the Church gets established with preaching and her Sacraments. Why not just keep it going? The short answer is that the Lord wants US to be his hands and feet and needs us spiritually to grow up.

 The same question exists in a different form when folks wonder why Jesus just did not stick around and keep healing folks or jump down from the cross and shout: "Ta-Dah!!" The Divine plan never had been for the Logos to live forever on earth as Jesus. To be truly human Jesus would need to die and to depart from terra firma as we all do, even his mother. Resulting from that would be his human absence to perform miracles as he did in his three short years of ministry.

 But to keep his ministerial work, primarily of saving souls, going in the millennia after his crucifixion he needed stand-ins or replacements, and that became the Church. But, for the Church to function as the Body of Christ required of it being able to function without, as they say in the insurance biz, the critical man personally being present. Thus, decisions and actions would have to be accomplished by people who were NOT in fact Jesus Christ himself.

 The Church never would have grown had Jesus stuck around. Everyone would have continued saying, "let's just leave it up to the Master". Similarly, momma birds eventually toss junior out of the nest so that he can learn to fly.

 With each birthday parents give children more and more freedom and responsibility over what they do. Infants or toddlers children pretty much go wherever and eat whenever mom decides. In first grade mom helps review a child's arithmetic or a drawing before the next class. In high school teenagers do math and compositions all by themselves—usually, and to the great relief of mom and dad always.

 And so the dramatic display of raw divine power over time is replaced with the less dramatic yet still awe-inspiring display of care and aid by members of God's church. The barrel of meal and jar of olive oil which never ran out, and kept a widow woman and son alive during a long famine for being hospitable to Elijah, has been replaced by parishioners showing up at the door with a casserole. A dying son or daughter is not brought back to health at a clergyman's appearance, but by a caring doctor who somehow manages to get to them just in the nick of time.

 Instead of operating in full view as with the Red Sea or miraculous cures, the Holy Spirit, Jesus' spirit, operates behind the scenes where the Church is established. Prayers get the ball rolling. As the result of prayers the Holy Spirit comes into, inspires, someone to do something which aids someone else in need.

The Church becomes the spigot through which the Lord's power gets poured out. Someone in the Church prays, not necessarily the priest, and the handle for the curative waters gets turned on again.

 So, in summary, miracles are still happening in great numbers. Usually they do not occur suddenly with only the priest as the intermediary.

Rather, they occur by the Holy Spirit's operation behind the scenes upon a member of the Church who directly or indirectly himself then causes the healing or aid to occur for someone in need. So, today many signs and wonders still are "wrought among the people", by the people, at the intercession of the Holy Spirit through Christ's Church. Amen. +