

Saint Bartholomew the Apostle's Day

Hymns: 370, 371, 310, 462

THE INTROIT

P: They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament:

C: and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

P: Jesus said, Ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration:

C: when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones.

P: I will bless the Lord at all times:

C: His praise shall continually be in my mouth.

THE COLLECT

O almighty God, who through Thy Son Jesus Christ didst choose Saint Bartholomew to be an Apostle to preach the blessed Gospel, give unto Thy Church evermore faithful teachers to proclaim the glory of Thy name; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

The First Lesson

Proverbs 3:1-8

My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: For length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: So shalt thou find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man. Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones.

THE GRADUAL

P: Their sound is gone out into all the earth:

C: and their words to the end of heaven.

P: The heavens declare the glory of God:

C: and the firmament show with forth His handiwork. Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

P: I have chosen you out of the world that ye should bring forth fruit:

C: and your fruit should remain. Hallelujah!

The Epistle

2 Corinthians 4:7-10

But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.

And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as he that serveth. Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Luke 22:24-30 — “That Ye May Eat and Drink at My Table in My Kingdom”

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Luke 22:24-30 — “That Ye May Eat and Drink at My Table in My Kingdom”

Grace, mercy, and peace to you all from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.
Amen.

The Sermon Text Is the Gospel Reading appointed for the Festival of St. Bartholomew the Apostle's Day: Luke 22:24-30:

And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as he that serveth. Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations. And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

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

INTRODUCTION

Today is the Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity, and it is also Saint Bartholomew the Apostle's Day. The appointed readings of the day are the readings for Saint Bartholomew the Apostle's Day. Church tradition, based upon the account of St. John, holds that St. Bartholomew and St. Nathanael are the same apostle, being named Bartholomew in the Synoptic Gospels and Nathanael in the Gospel according to St. John. Bartholomew means *son of the furrowed*. Nathanael means *given of God*. Working under the assumption that this tradition is accurate, we have a bit of insight into the character of Bartholomew. For the Lord Jesus says of Nathanael, **“Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!”** (John 1:47)

With this in mind, it is very interesting to notice that the selected reading of the Gospel for this day of St. Bartholomew the apostle is a text that begins by recording of all the apostles, **“And there was also a strife among them, . . .”**

As we study this further we will see that there is a connection between the two. According to His gracious authority the Lord Jesus addresses the strife that was among the apostles and brings them to the fuller understanding of whom He has called them to be, and additionally whom He has called us to be. This is a manifestation of the power of the Gospel to make saints of sinners. This is grace, pure grace. This is the life of the Church.

I. AND THERE WAS ALSO A STRIFE AMONG THEM

And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.

This is not a very pretty picture for those who profess to be disciples of Christ. **“And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.”** Yet this certainly is not a thing foreign to us. How often has this contention arisen among those professing to be disciples or followers of Christ? We find this recorded as happening more than once among the apostles prior to the suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ to the throne of glory. But after these events, these glorious and life-changing events, this is not the way.

Yet in today’s text we hear, **“And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.”**

The word that is translated “*strife*” is *philoneikia*, which means *affection for quarrel*. Indeed, according to our own sinful nature, such is what we display in our lives, even within the holy communion of the saints. Yes, according to our sinful nature we act selfishly and without unity. According to our own reason and strength we argue amongst ourselves, seeking to elevate ourselves above one another, for this is the attitude that dwells in our hearts and minds. Therefore we argue because we love ourselves not according to the love that God gives but according to the love of the flesh. Our flesh craves recognition. Our flesh craves glory. Our flesh craves to receive acknowledgment and to be appreciated by others. Our flesh also fears being rejected. Our flesh cringes at the possibility of being ignored. And so according to our flesh we stand up and seek to be recognized. We promote our own image to be held up amongst our brethren.

This is what makes us fond of quarreling. We want to be recognized as the ones who are right. We want to receive an accounting amongst others as the ones to whom others should look. We want to have people to depend upon us and to turn toward us for answers and for advice. We want people to turn to us so that we can tell them how things ought to be and what they ought to do. The one thing that we do not want is to be humbled among others.

It is very interesting to notice the setting in which our text occurs. Actually the fuller context should cause us to be filled with fear. For this is the night in which our Lord Jesus Christ was to be betrayed. It was the night of the final Passover meal. The Lord Jesus was at table with His twelve disciples. They were eating the Passover meal together. Jesus announced that His betrayer was at the table eating with them and the disciples began to question among themselves who could be the one that would do such a thing. And then Luke records that as they were discussing this they also began striving amongst themselves over who was greatest among them.

Is this not a frightening thing to observe? Is this not the same way that we act? When we come to the Lord’s Table do we do so in the true unity of the one true body of Christ gathered in His name according to the one true faith that He has established for us? When we come to the Lord’s Table, upon whom are our hearts and minds depending? When we come forward to the Lord’s Table, to whom are our hearts directed? Are our hearts turned toward the Lord and focused upon the unity of His body upon which we feast? Are we focused upon the forgiveness and life which we drink in the communion of His blood? Are we coming because of His gracious command that we should receive from Him in His body what we cannot obtain for ourselves by our own efforts, or by our own choices, or by our own decisions? Are we coming as desperate and needy sinners who have been baptized into the body of Christ, united as one in doctrine and practice, gathered together with the same needs to receive what God has promised to grant us for Christ’s sake? Or do we come to the table imagining that this is something between

ourselves as individuals and God? Do we treat this as a communion between ourselves and God or as the communion of the body of Christ and God? Do we come for the satisfaction of our own needs as individuals, or as the common need that we share in together as sinners who have been called by the Gospel to receive from God His forgiveness and life by which we are reconciled to Him and to one another, both for this life and the life to come?

When we gather in the name of Jesus who is in charge? Whose thoughts and words and deeds are the thoughts and words and deeds upon which we are focused? What is the purpose for our gathering together? What does it mean to be in fellowship together?

What does the Holy Spirit want us to hear as we encounter the words that St. Luke records for us, **“And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest.”**?

II. BUT YE SHALL NOT BE SO

The answer is given by our Lord Jesus:

And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? Is not he that sitteth at meat? But I am among you as he that serveth. Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations.

“But ye shall not be so.” More precisely He says, **“Ye, however, not like this!”** Notice that no verb is supplied. This is not a command. This is a statement of fact. The Lord Jesus is declaring to His disciples, His disciples of all time but especially to His apostles and future leaders of His Church on earth, **“You-all are not like the Gentiles, for I have called you be in My Holy Communion, which I am about to ordain for you and for all whom I shall call out of the world to be in communion with Me.”**

How fitting that this text should be appointed on the Festival of the Day of St. Bartholomew, whom we also know as Nathanael, of whom Jesus said, **“Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!”**

If we consider this statement and the context of what Jesus says about the one who was about to hear His Lord call him into apostleship, it really is a very powerful statement.

Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.

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

Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee.

Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel.

Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these.

And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man. (John 1:45-51)

Do you know what guile is? Guile is deceit. Guile is the clever attempts to avoid facing the truth. Guile is when a person knows what is right and true and then tries to argue against it so as to be able to accept things that are easier or that do not cause one to be in conflict with the world or with family or with one's own conscience. Guile is to accept the notion that honesty can exist in part, that there can be degrees of honesty.

Of Nathanael the Lord Jesus declares, "**Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!**" He says this of the one who heard Philip declare that the one for whom they all had been waiting anxiously, the one who for thousands of years had been prophesied, the one by whom all that is evil and wrong would be overturned, had finally come, Jesus says this of this Nathanael who recalls what he knew of the Scriptures concerning the promised Messiah and Savior and challenged Philip's claim. He challenged whether the Christ could come out of Nazareth. And Nathanael was absolutely correct not to compromise on this issue, for Jesus was not born in Nazareth, but in the city of David, even as the Scriptures promise.

This Nathanael or Bartholomew was not one who could be tricked and he would not go along to get along. Nevertheless, he did as Philip urged him to do. He came and he saw. Moreover, he confessed Jesus as not only as the Son of David, whom most expected to rule according to an earthly rule, but as the Son of God!

Truly, this confession was equal to the confession that Simon Peter made quite some time later. Yes, indeed, Nathanael's confession of Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God came before the confession of St. Peter. Like Simon Peter, Nathanael received this not from his own reason and strength, nor from men and their creeds and church bodies and traditions and constitutions and conventions, but from the Father. So who is greater, the one who said it upon his first encounter with the Lord or the one who said it long afterward? Yet as they were gathered with their Lord at the Passover meal they thought of such things and argued about who was the greatest. The love of such quarrels continues even today whenever people gather not in the name of Jesus, but in the name of their own churches or families or communities or even themselves.

"But," says the Lord of the Church, **"You-all, not like this!"**

He proceeds to explain to them why they are not like the Gentiles. The worldly way is that certain ones stand as lords over others and exercise authority over them. According to the way of the world, the one who is served is greater than the one who serves. **"I, however,"** says the LORD, the Creator and Ruler of the universe, the Almighty, **"I am in the midst of you-all as the deacon."** Of Himself Jesus says that He is not the one that is served, but the one who attends to the needs of others. Such is the way of the LORD, the King of kings and Lord of lords. He calls disciples unto Himself in order that He may attend to them. And then they argue over who is to be counted as the greatest among them.

But the LORD says, **“You-all, not like this!”**

This is not the way. This is not who you-all are. Not anymore. No. You are now members of My body. And even this is not by your choice or your decision or your doing. This is what I have done for you-all.

If you have any doubts as to this, listen to the next words where Jesus confirms this for His disciples. **“Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations.”**

Nope. They were not of the world. They continued with Jesus in His temptations. They were being carried along the by the Holy Spirit to go with Jesus to Golgotha. They had been with Jesus throughout His ministry. They had been spurned by family and friends. They were now about to go to Gethsemane, and then to the courtyard, and then to the Praetorium, and then to the place of the skull, and then to the grave. In all of this, even though Peter denied Jesus three times, even with cursing, only one stopped following Jesus. The Father kept them safe in the one true faith even through all of Jesus’ temptations, so that even after the death of their Lord, they still gathered in His name, though they were afraid and did not understand. Nevertheless, the faith that is of Jesus remained at work in them and kept them together in the one true faith, even without the right understanding of that faith.

When this was the nature of their gathering, the words of Jesus proved themselves to be absolutely true. **“You-all, not like this!”** No more love of quarrels over who was greatest rose up when they gathered. They simply clung to the faith that had hold of their hearts and minds and they were kept with their Lord even when they had no understanding of how this was being done. They simply continued in the Holy Communion because this is who they were by the regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.

III. THAT YE MAY EAT AND DRINK AT MY TABLE IN MY KINGDOM

Here is the clincher:

And I appoint unto you a kingdom, as my Father hath appointed unto me; That ye may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

Listen again:

And I also set apart to you-all just as also set apart to Me the Father of Me a kingdom.

To His disciples the Lord of the Kingdom sets apart a kingdom, His own kingdom. This entire kingdom is devoted to one purpose. And to what purpose does the Lord of this Kingdom say that His kingdom is devoted? He says,

In order that you-all should eat and you-all should drink upon the table of Me in the kingdom of Me and you-all should sit upon thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

This was a totally closed communion. Jesus and the twelve disciples, that was all who were partakers. But wait! Judas, the son of perdition was there. He was dismissed before

the New Testament was instituted and Jesus knew that Judas was lost and would not be one of the twelve after leaving to betray his Lord. Judas ate and drank of the Old Testament but not of the New. Only eleven ate and drank of the New Testament! Yet Jesus says twelve would eat and drink in the kingdom and that twelve would sit on thrones to judge the twelve tribes of Israel.

Ah! Jesus was also speaking of Matthias, whom He would appoint to take the place of Judas, just prior to the promised outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church. Until Matthias was appointed the promise could not be fulfilled. The entire Church waited for the ordination of this one man to sit upon the seat of judgment entrusted to the apostles. Not even Peter could continue with the boldness required until this vacant seat of judgment was filled. For no one apostle was greater than another. No one apostle could lead the Church or be set up as the one from whom apostolic authority would be handed down. Just as no one tribe of Israel was greater than another, and no one tribe of Israel could move onward toward the land of the promise without the others, and no one tribe could move until the Lord commanded it, so it was among the apostles.

For the seat of judgment in the Church is not entrusted to the apostles individually. For these thrones are not theirs, as our Lord declares in today's text. These seats of judgment belong to Him, just as the kingdom is His kingdom. Literally, if we allow the word order to stand, the seats of judgment over the Church and the kingdom are OF Him. Thus, when the apostles sit to judge the Church they sit upon Jesus in Jesus. Being baptized into Jesus they sit upon the Rock upon which those who resist are broken to pieces and those who stand as one upon this Rock stand forevermore.

Later St. Paul would also be set apart to serve as an apostle, the thirteenth apostle. Even though the other twelve would also preach to the world, St. Paul was set apart as the apostle to the world to bring in those who were outside the twelve tribes. Interestingly, St. Paul, who calls himself the least of the apostles, preached in more areas and to more people and founded more congregations and ordained more pastors than any of the Twelve, and all of this without receiving anything from the Twelve.

Yet all thirteen apostles had this in common, they ate and drank at the table of Jesus in the kingdom of Jesus, and they judged the Church with the Law and Gospel of Jesus.

CONCLUSION

So then, who is the greatest in the kingdom of God? Isn't that a foolish question? God is the greatest. Who is greatest among the twelve apostles? Jesus, who is the only true apostle, from whom all the apostles receive their place in the kingdom. And for what purpose are the apostles set apart? They are set apart in order that they should eat and drink at the table of the LORD.

The key is in knowing who is over the rest of the kingdom. Jesus is. No one has any authority in the Church except the authority of Jesus, the Word of God. He rules the Church and sets apart ministers to serve Him to the Church. Through these servants of the Word Jesus shepherds His Church. First Jesus feeds and tends to His servants, and then through them He feeds and tends to the entire Church. The Church stands judged in communion with Christ. It is in Him that we have our life. It is in Him that we receive the forgiveness of our sins. It is in Him that we receive rest for our souls. The servants or ministers merely judge the Church according to the Word so that those who are truly in Christ should eat and drink at the table of Christ, where they feast on His body and blood in the kingdom of Christ.

Can this happen outside the body of Christ? Of course not! How can the lifeblood of the body be received where the body is not present? This is why the Twelve had to be set apart to judge the Church. This is why the ordination of pastors continues to be necessary for the life of the Church. For where this judgement or discernment of the body is not done, those who gather eat and drink not at the table of Life, but at the table of death. And death is not what the LORD calls us to receive. He calls us to come and to receive His life and to abide in Him in the unity of His body and in the renewal and cleansing of His blood. He established this even before going to the cross. He set it apart as His everlasting Testament so that with the apostles we should eat and drink at the Table of the LORD and abide in the Kingdom of Him forevermore, where the love of quarrels and where all causes of doubt cannot abide. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The peace of God that surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus forever. Amen.