

SAINT BARTHOLOMEW APOSTLE 2015
SERMON – SAINT JOSEPH PARISH
FATHER CRAIG LOONEY
ACTS 5.12 ST. LUKE 22.24



What's in a name? According to Father Massey Shepherd, author of the Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary, Bartholomew isn't a name at all. It's a patronymic that means "the plowman's son".

We do know at least this much about Bartholomew...his father plowed fields. Perhaps Bartholomew worked alongside his father plowing fields...and later took part in the harvest. Bartholomew is something of a mystery man. Even the lessons appointed for his feast day, don't mention him.

The Lesson from Acts talks about the Apostles healing people. Bartholomew was an Apostle. Jesus promised the Apostles they would do many great things, including healing people. Bartholomew shared in this Apostleship of Healing. Saint Joseph Parish continues to offer prayers for healing at Mass and laying on of hands to anyone at any time.

The Gospel is another one of those "you've got to be kidding" stories. A few weeks ago we heard the story from Matthew about Mrs. Zebedee asking Jesus to give her two wonderful boys, James and John, the best seats in his kingdom. In today's Gospel from Luke we have the disciples arguing among themselves who should be considered the greatest.

Our friend Father Hudson Stuck would probably have something to say about that. If you want to really be great at your work, pay attention to what Jesus says in the Gospel..."I am among you as one that serves...learn from me what it means to serve others".

Bartholomew is identified as Philip's friend in all three Synoptic Gospels. John identifies Nathanael as Philip's friend. We believe Nathanael and Bartholomew are the same person. So we could call him Nathanael Bartholomew.

Philip is the one who introduces Nathanael Bartholomew to Jesus. He tells Nathanael they have found the Messiah and his name is Jesus, Joseph's son, from Nazareth. Now we have another "you've got to be kidding" response, this time from Nathanael.

Nathanael is at first skeptical about Jesus when he learns he is from Nazareth. He makes fun of Jesus by saying nothing good can come from Nazareth. He basically calls Jesus a country bumpkin. But he goes along with Philip to see Jesus anyway.

When Jesus sees Nathanael he calls him an "honest man without any deceit". Jesus recognized in Nathanael the honesty and integrity needed to be an Apostle. His clever acknowledgement of Nathanael convinces Nathanael that Jesus is the real deal.

John tells us Jesus appeared to Nathanael and Philip right after the Resurrection. Acts tells us Nathanael and Philip witnessed the Ascension. Except for these brief appearances, Scripture says nothing else about the life and work of Nathanael Bartholomew.

What we know about Bartholomew's later life comes largely from the early 4th Century Church historian Eusebius. In his *Church History*, Eusebius talks about a man named Pantaneus who undertook a missionary journey to India about 100 years earlier. Pantaneus found a thriving church community and a copy of Matthew's Gospel written in Hebrew, which he was told was left there by Bartholomew.

Tradition tells us Bartholomew and another Apostle, Jude Thaddeus, brought Christianity to Armenia, where Bartholomew was martyred. Jude later died in Persia. Bartholomew and Jude paid the ultimate price for their witness. Bartholomew and Jude are the patron saints of Armenia and the Armenian Apostolic Church.

Nathanael Bartholomew, the plowman's son, went on to plow a much larger field and sew it with the seeds of the Good News about Jesus. And the harvest of souls was great in Armenia and elsewhere.

What's in a name? Quite a lot, actually! Jesus promised Nathanael Bartholomew he would do great things...and he did...and we are grateful for the work he did as an Apostle with genuine humility and gladness. Let us try to learn by his example that greatness comes in serving others.

