

March 16, 2008
Sunday of Orthodoxy
John 1:44-52

The gospel today speaks about 2 men who became disciples of Christ. They were friends and familiar with the yearning of each others' hearts to be with God. They knew the scripture and pondered its inner meaning. One day, Philip finds his friend Nathaniel, and with joy brings to him the news, "We have found Him - the one that Moses and the Prophets wrote about! Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph!" Nathaniel asks him, knowing the prophecy that Bethlehem would be the home of the Messiah, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" This is not a sarcastic or malicious remark, but the concern of a sincere heart, who seeks to know the genuine truth. No brighter words, harbingers of great joy, had ever come to Nathaniel. And yet, because he genuinely wants to test the truth, he ruminates what course of action he might take. Philip, being his friend, and seeing his quandary, responds simply and without manipulation, "Come and see."

It is Philip's way of saying, "We have found Him, the Truth, Who our hearts have yearned for our whole lives. We have found Him, Whose divine and human personality radiates divine light and illuminates the cosmos." These same words, "Come and see", certainly apply to us in this day and in this church. We are telling people, "Come and see the Promise we have been given. Come and be kindled by the unwaning light, that is Christ, Himself." We hope people will not be put off by our sinfulness and shortcomings, because knowing ourselves, we also know we are not the best witnesses of what is divine and holy. But still we say, "Come and see. Come and see the beauty of our Lord, His sacrificial love, and His cross. Come and see His teachings, His sufferings, the holiness of the Gospel, which people have sought to destroy and distort." We tell people not to look at our sins, but look to the Lord, the great saints, who from ancient times have adorned the Church, and some of whose icons adorn this temple.

"Come and See" are words of great import. In coming to see Christ, the context of our life is changed, from one based on the world, with all of its promises and mirages, to one oriented in the divine-human organism of the Church, whose head is Christ. The Church is unique, standing alone, beyond and outside the realm of space and time. She includes within herself, living members, of whom we strive to be numbered, comprising the Church Militant, on earth, and those who have departed this life over the centuries, and comprise the Church Triumphant, in heaven. Both groups are numbered in the one body of Christ. Both groups have heard these words, "Come and see."

We are called to work outside our normal comfort zone and extend a simple invitation to our friends in the world who hunger for the Lord, and do not know how or where to

find Him. We invite people, as the Lord tells us, from the highways and byways, to wear the same white baptismal garment that has been given to us, to be cleansed of the same kind of impurities we are being cleansed of.

The world we live in is filled with uncertainties and conflicting philosophies which confuse our friends who seek the truth. The same is true with Philip and Nathaniel. St. Bede writes, "Philip advises him, so that if there remained any uncertainty in his heart, actually seeing and talking might wipe it all away. The pious hearer did not delay, devoting himself to the One Who had been proclaimed to him."

Philip's ready acceptance of Christ, his invitation, as a good friend to Nathaniel, to meet Christ, and Nathaniel's guileless reception and ready acceptance of the proof Christ gives to him about seeing him under the fig tree, helped join them to the great cloud of witnesses that we celebrate today. Sometimes our missionary endeavors go very slow, and sometimes, like St. Herman of Alaska, there are periods where our labors bear abundant fruit. He wrote in May, 1795, to Abbot Nazarius of Valaam, "In the preceding 7 months, we have baptized 7,000 Native Americans, performed 2000 weddings." He wrote, "We live happily. They love us and we love them. The people are good, but poor."

That is the key for us as well. We are called to love each other, and in that love, to meet Christ. We see the love of Philip and Nathaniel, the love of the Lord receiving them as disciples, the love of Christ for His Church, and the love of the great cloud of witnesses who most certainly are our brethren. Before Christ, only a very small number of prophets and men were pleasing to God, were worthy to see the heavens open, but after His coming, a great company has risen to the height of heaven. Let us join with them, as we join with Christ, who loves mankind and invites us to be with Him in the love of the Holy Trinity and of all of our brotherhood in Christ.