

Bible Study Notes 4/15/2015

John 1:35-50 *Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest thou? He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where he dwelt, and abode with him that day: for it was about the tenth hour. One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, he said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is by interpretation, a stone. The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me. Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. 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.*

We just completed the 40 day fast of Great Lent, Holy Week and Pascha—the Resurrection of Christ. In this Gospel today, St. John doesn't give us the 'backstory,' but St. Matthew does in Matt. 4:1-21. He describes how Jesus was baptized by John in the Jordan, then went into the wilderness for 40 days and was tempted by the Devil. This 40 days in the wilderness is also an image of fast of Great Lent. When we fast, we're tempted too and need to use the Holy Scriptures and God's help to overcome those temptations.

So now having completed the fast, Jesus in a sense 'goes public' in that He now begins His ministry openly and one of the first things He does is start calling His disciples to follow Him. It is significant HOW He calls the disciples. First of all, these men: Andrew, Simon, Philip, Nathanael and one other 'unknown' disciple (who some Holy Fathers say was St. John the Evangelist), were disciples of John the Baptist. So, they had already been trying to live a spiritual life and were instructed by John the Baptist in this.

When John the Baptist tells his two disciples that Jesus is the Lamb of God, he is acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah, (in that Jesus became the sacrificial Lamb Who offers Himself for our deliverance from darkness and death) and he is encouraging them to follow Jesus now.

Again, HOW does Jesus call them? He first asks them what they seek. They acknowledge Him as Rabbi (in other words Teacher) and ask where He is staying. Instead of handing them a business card or something, Jesus tells them to "Come and See." Notice how shortly after this, Philip imitates Jesus when he goes to tell Nathanael under the fig tree about Jesus and Nathanael asks

'can anything good come out of Nazareth' and Philip says "Come and See!" Philip is a fast learner!

Today, many spiritual ideas are presented in an abstract way, as though everything can be reduced to philosophical ideas. Here, Jesus invites them to "Come and See," which is a call to experience and practice the spiritual life and discipleship to Christ—not just to sit around discussing it. This is one of the most important aspects of our spiritual life—to put it into practice—to experience it which we do by being obedient to all that Christ commands us through His Holy Church.

It often happens that someone interested in Orthodoxy will try to "figure everything out" logically and will email the priest, asking questions about Orthodoxy. These will often be deep and profound questions. However, it's almost like if lay person were to ask a physicist what $e=mc^2$ means. Yet, if a physicist who had been studying Einstein's theory of relativity for decades tried to answer this question for someone who had only a basic grasp of arithmetic, it would be very difficult. So, then one question leads to many more questions and many more emails and hours of research and finally, it really comes down to the matter of a person being willing to "Come and See" for themselves.

It is really only when we come to church and are totally immersed in the Grace of the Holy Spirit through the Sacraments and Divine Services that our souls, minds and hearts can begin to understand some of the higher truths about our relationship to God, our salvation and all the rest. But it also takes some effort on our part outside of the church services, such as keeping the fasts, praying at home, and reading the Scriptures and spiritual books daily and regularly. This helps prepare us, so that when we come to church we have a much deeper experience and it's more meaningful.

If you've ever been to an opera that's sung in Italian, unless you have some basic grasp of the story and have a libretto of the English translation, you are going to miss a lot. Even though the singing might be very beautiful, unless you understand Italian, they may as well just be humming a pretty tune with no meaning at all.

So if we do these things, we may start to experience a little bit of the Grace of the Holy Spirit and it can be quite startling and amazing! However, there is a LOT more; which is why Jesus said to Nathanael 'if you're impressed that I could see you under the tree even though I was not physically there and that I could know your name and things about you even though I had never met you, then you're in for a quite a surprise, because you're going to see greater things than these: angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man!'