

Bartholomew

26 8 12

Almighty and everlasting God,
who gave your apostle Bartholomew grace
truly to believe and to preach your word:
grant that your Church
may love that word he believed
and may faithfully preach and receive the same.

Our text may be found the gospel according to St John's chapter 1 and verse 51:
'You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on
the Son of Man.'

Here in Dinard, we usually celebrate the feast of St Bartholomew, in memory of whom our church is named and dedicated, on the nearest Sunday after 24th August. The church of St Bartholomew in Rome on an island in the Tiber is said to house the remains of our saint though in the eleventh century before the Norman Conquest, Emma, wife of King Canute, gave an arm of Saint Bartholomew to Canterbury Cathedral which may account in part for Bartholomew's relative popularity in England during the Middle Ages where 165 churches were dedicated to him.

In John's gospel, Bartholomew is called Nathaniel. The problem of one man having two names is easily resolved. Bartholomew would have been his surname –

‘son of Tolmai’. Nathaniel would have been his given name at his circumcision – ‘gift of God’. This is the general consensus among modern scholars and provides us with this morning’s text from the opening chapter of John’s gospel: ‘**You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.**’

I want to make one simple point about our patron saint – he was a man, a human being like us. Like us, he was born, he lived and died. Like us, he was part of a family; he had friends; he knew pleasure and pain. But unlike us, God-willing, he was a martyr who, according to the Roman Martyrology, met a particularly unpleasant death by being flayed alive in Albanopolis, a city in Armenia on the shores of the Caspian Sea.

Like us, Bartholomew was a man who wanted to believe in the promise of a Messiah; in his case a Messiah who would one day restore the Kingdom to Israel. Through the kindness of his friend, Philip, Bartholomew met that Messiah in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. When Philip told him of Jesus, Bartholomew was naturally sceptical: he hid behind an old prejudice: the doubt that anything good could come from Nazareth. But his friend, Philip, knew Bartholomew well and simply invited him to come and see for himself – and he did. Meeting with Jesus, Bartholomew couldn’t fail to be impressed. He felt Jesus already knew him, knew the person he was, the person he hoped to be and Bartholomew was inspired to declare ‘**Rabbi, you are the Son of God ! You are the King of Israel**’. It is an extraordinary confession of faith which occurs some three years and 19 chapters

before Thomas makes a similar declaration of faith when, having touched Jesus, he says 'My Lord and my God' (20 v28).

Jesus promises Bartholomew a vision that is our text today: 'You will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.' In her icon of St Bartholomew that Karen Blampied wrote here in church just a year ago to celebrate the 140th anniversary of our church's foundation in this place, she represents that vision by a light shining down on our saint from the top right hand corner of the icon. We don't know when that vision was granted Bartholomew. I like to think that in his death when the pain of being flayed alive separating his skin from his flesh Bartholomew had the comfort of that vision, a vision that would ultimately take him to heaven.

In the Sistine chapel, in his masterpiece of the Last Judgement, Michelangelo depicts a naked St Bartholomew before the throne of Christ. He sits looking up at the man in whom he believed and trusted. May we, following in his footsteps of faith, like Bartholomew respond to the love of God embodied in his Son, Jesus Christ.

I have spoken in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

*Preached at the Eucharist
St Bartholomew's, Dinard
26th August, 2012*

H: Sermon 26 : Bartholomew

