

Saint Bartholomew/X Trinity 2025

Sermon - Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

Acts 5.12-16 St. Luke 22.24-30



What does it mean to be a martyr for Christ and how do we become one? We almost always think of martyrs as men and women who died for their political or religious convictions. However, the word “martyr” comes from the Greek word meaning “witness”. We became martyrs... witnesses for Christ...at our baptisms.

We know very little about the man Bartholomew, whose feast day we celebrate today. He is not even mentioned in the reading from Acts or the Gospel from Luke. Even his name “Bartholomew”, isn’t really a name. It’s a patronymic that comes from Aramaic and means “son of Tolmai”, or “son of the furrows”. He may or may not have worked the fields alongside his father. If Bartholomew was standing here today, we might call him Plowerson, like Johnson or Peterson.

Bartholomew is listed as one of the Twelve Apostles in the three Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, paired with Philip. In John’s Gospel, Philip is the one who introduces his good friend Nathaniel to Jesus, whom he believes is the promised Messiah. Most Biblical scholars today believe Nathaniel and Bartholomew are the same person.

What follows is actually a very funny story. Nathaniel Bartholomew is at first skeptical Jesus has anything good to say, after all, he was from Nazareth...a town people made fun of...place full of country bumpkins. When Jesus sees Nathaniel Bartholomew, he calls him an “honest man without any deceit”. Jesus recognized in Nathaniel Bartholomew the honesty and integrity needed to be an Apostle. That was enough to convince Nathaniel Bartholomew that Jesus was the real deal...and he decided to followed him.

What we know about Bartholomew’s later life comes largely from the early 4<sup>th</sup> Century Church historian Eusebius. In his *Church History*, Eusebius talks about a Christian teacher named Panteanus from Alexandria who undertook a missionary journey to India about 100 years earlier. The India Eusebius is referring to is not the India we think of today. It was likely Ethiopia or East Africa. Panteanus found a thriving Christian Community that possessed a copy of Matthew’s Gospel

written in Hebrew, reportedly left there by Nathaniel Bartholomew years earlier.

What do we learn about witnessing for Christ from today's readings? Jesus promised the Apostles they would do many great things, including healing people. The Lesson from Acts talks about the Apostles healing people. Bartholomew shared in this Apostleship of Healing. Saint Joseph Parish offers prayers for healing at every Sunday Mass, and laying-on-of-hands for healing in the Name of the Trinity is available to anyone at any time.

We learn from the Luke's Gospel an argument broke out among the Apostles to which one of them was the greatest. There is also an element of humor in the story. We can almost see Jesus rolling his eyes and saying, "Really? You have been with me all this time and you still don't get why I'm here. I came to serve. True greatness comes in serving others."

According to tradition, Nathaniel Bartholomew and another Apostle, Jude Thaddeus, brought Christianity to Armenia. Armenia was the first country to officially adopt Christianity. Nathaniel Bartholomew and Jude paid the ultimate price for being witnesses to Christ. Jesus promised Nathaniel Bartholomew he would do great things...and he did. But he did not do his work to glorify himself...he did his work to glorify God.

What does it mean to be a martyr for Christ and how do we become one? It's unlikely any of us here today will face the ultimate test of our faith. Let's consider the following prayer a call to action...that is what being a martyr for Christ is all about...

*...“Saint Bartholomew, help all Christians to see in your example of martyrdom a heroic witness to perseverance in the face of difficulty, of fidelity in the face of doubt, and of courage in the face of timidity. May we have a portion of what you had in abundance. Amen.”*

Let's follow Nathaniel Bartholomew and put our baptismal promises to be martyrs...dynamic witnesses for Christ...to work.

