

**HOMILY AT ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH  
SUNDAY, MARCH 5, 2023**

**JOHN 1: 43-51**

**“IMITATE ST. PHILIP”**

Entomologists tell us that honey bees are great dancers---let me explain. If a honey bee comes across a good source of nectar it doesn't become selfish with it. Instead, it flies back to the hive to let the other bees know about it. Before the other bees it performs an intricate dance scientists call the waggle dance. In a waggle dance the bee goes through all kinds of contortions and wiggling that conveys a message to the other bees..... it somehow lets them know how far and in what direction the source of nectar is. So that they can all get some, too.

How amazing God's creation is! But the actual point of my telling you about the waggle dance is how the bees are unselfish. If a bee finds something good he shares it with the other bees.

In our gospel lesson today from John 1, Philip is like a honey bee. He finds something very good indeed---Jesus Christ! And the first thing he does is to go and share the good news.

In our reading today (John 1:43-51), our Lord Jesus is choosing some of His Twelve Disciples. Philip was the third one He chose. Philip is very excited that this Jesus of Nazareth is actually the long-awaited Messiah, the Son of God! Very good news! And like a honey bee, he quickly takes off to share the good news with his good friend, Nathanael. Hear how it happens in verses 45-46---“Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote---Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’ And Nathanael said to him, ‘Can anything good come out of Nazareth?’ Philip said to him, ‘Come and see.’” Philip had met the Son of God. He couldn't stay quite about it. He went to tell Nathanael.

We all have Nathanaels in our lives---people we know who do not know Jesus Christ. Some of them maybe don't even think there is a Lord to know---the atheists or agnostics you are acquainted with. Or your Nathanael may believe there is a Lord, but he doesn't believe in the real Lord, Jesus Christ. Perhaps he is Hindu, or Buddhist, or Muslim, or of the Jewish faith, or something else..... Or your Nathanael may simply have no interest whatsoever in any kind of God. Or maybe he does have some belief in

Christ, but that belief isn't important in in life. It just has no impact on him. Prayer or going to church is a rare event for him. Such folks are often called "nominal Christians". They are really Christians "in name only." They can be of any denomination. They can be of Orthodox background. They have a bit of belief in Christ, but He is sure not very important to them.

Well, whatever kind of Nathanael you know (and you may know some of all those types!), you should be your Nathanael's Philip! Being a Philip to a Nathanael means to somehow share with them the good news of Jesus Christ. One way or another we should be saying to our Nathanaels what Philip said to his Nathanael in verse 46---"Come and see!"

And maybe the simplest way to do that is to actually do what Philip did with Nathanael---he invited him to come and see the Lord. You can do a very similar thing by saying, in so many words, to your Nathanael---"Come and see us worship Christ at church." Just a friendly invitation---and who knows? Your Nathanael might just do it! Sure, I would guess that if you invite several Nathanaels to church, the majority won't come. But perhaps one will---and one soul is of infinite worth! And maybe when he or she comes to the liturgy God will touch that person's heart---and they will turn towards Jesus Christ.

Making it a very specific invitation increases the odds of that visit actually happening. Something like asking the person to meet you at the church door at 10 a.m. on such and such a date. Or even better yet---maybe offering to give that Nathanael a ride to church....and maybe go out for lunch afterwards.

I don't do much grocery shopping....Bonnie does almost all of it. Several reasons---I don't enjoy it. And I like food too much---- so it's kind of dangerous for me to get the groceries---who knows what treats will end up in the cart! And I commonly have trouble finding things in the store. So if I go shopping it's usually a quick trip for just a couple of items. But it still gets messy.

Just a few days ago I was in the Berea Giant Eagle with a mission to buy 2 items---spicy hummus and garlic flavored pita chips. Simple? Well.... I found the hummus right away but things went south from there on. It seemed logical to me that pita chips, which are usually eaten with hummus, would be in the same area. So I searched that aisle---no luck. Then I figured they must be with all the other chips in the snack food aisle. And that presented a danger, because I might "accidentally" get a big bag of Fritos while finding the pita chips. But I resisted that temptation...however, no pita chips in that aisle either. Now I was feeling hopeless---after all it's a big store! Where to

look? Then a cashier happened to be walking near me. So I got bold and did what men hate to do: ask for directions. She was very nice and began telling me how to find the elusive pita chips. But she must have seen my eyes glazing over as the directions weren't that simple.....and so she said, "You know what would be best?.....I'll just take you there." And I followed her right to the pita chips and success!

Maybe your Nathanael is like me----maybe not just a verbal invitation, but actually taking him to church or meeting him at church is best! However you do it, one way or another, tell your Nathanael---"Come and see!" Maybe he will do it---and maybe he will find God.

Oftentimes, saving souls (which is what we are talking about after all) requires more than just a simple invite. More words can often be very helpful. But for that to happen, we have to talk to people. So if you are naturally shy, work at overcoming that when you have a Nathanael you could talk a bit with. Cultivate conversations with acquaintances and, when appropriate, even with strangers. A little comment about the weather can sometimes end up a brief visit about just about anything! Talk to people---neighbors, at work, at the gym, at the store. If a bit of a conversation develops, perhaps you can say something like, "What's this week like for you?". And the other person may say a little about that and then respond with something like---"How about you? Anything special going on?" And then you can answer, "Well, it's Lent so I'll be in church quite a bit." Perhaps the end of the conversation, *but* you never know. The person's response may be---"Oh, what kind of church do you belong to?" And then who know where that conversation could lead---that person might be sitting with you in the liturgy the next Sunday!

Sure, often such simple attempts are a long shot. Maybe one out of 50 leads anywhere at all---but, as I said before, if it results just one time in someone coming to God, it is very well worth it. And that person will someday in the future be with you in heaven thanking you for getting that soul-saving conversation going back here on earth.

I know some of us are naturally shy. (I myself am.) But for the sake of the souls of all the Nathanaels around us, sometimes we have to overcome that shyness and talk to people!

But words are not enough. Not just what we say, but how we *live* is extremely important when it comes to that Nathanael we know. How we act, how we speak, how we treat others, etc. will be a huge factor! Imagine Nathanael really thought Philip was not a very good person at all---he

probably would have paid little attention when Philip talked to him about Jesus. Is our life a good witness to the Christ we want to share with others?

The great St. Gregory the Theologian said the following words about his close friend, St. Basil the Great, back in the 300's A.D. ---"Basil's speech was like thunder, because his life was like lightning." (Jaroslav Pelikan, The Christian Tradition, Vol. 5, University of Chicago Press, p. 55) Basil's life was so full of light, it was like a lightning bolt in the world. And that gave great power to anything he said—his words were like thunder! If someone's life is holy, their words have more impact.

So be like Philip---watch for opportunities to invite your "Nathanael" to "come and see". Most won't, but perhaps some, even if just one, will. And that could lead to a soul being saved! A very big thing, indeed!

As I urge you to do this, I must also commend you! *You are already doing a lot of this*----I know because of all the new folks in our parish recently: catechumens, seekers, Orthodox who had faded away, people from different religious backgrounds, even atheists----coming to the Lord and His Holy Church. Almost more lately than I can keep track of!—what a wonderful problem. And it's not just a current phenomenon here at St. Matthew's ----it's going on in many, many Orthodox congregations around the country. And mostly young folks! God is doing a great work. As society seems to go down, people, thank God, are turning to Christ and His ancient Church.

And you are the key in all this. Care for others you know. Pray and hope for the best for all the Nathanaels in your life. Talk with them, be friends with them----and invite them to "come and see".....so that more and more people may begin to worship our Lord Jesus Christ.