

First Sunday of the Great Fast

Dear Brothers and Sisters!

On the first Sunday of the Great Fast, the Church offers a reflection on the Gospel passage about the calling of the apostles by Christ. Were the apostles perfect? Far from it. When Philip found Nathanael, the Gospel of John relates that he said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." However, just two verses earlier, John told us that: "Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Follow me.'" So, who exactly found whom? Did Jesus find Philip, or did Philip find Christ? We might very well ask, "To whom should we attribute the faith professed that day by the Apostles Philip and Nathanael?" Jumping ahead 20 centuries, we might also ask where our own faith comes from.

The answer to these questions is one that has not changed throughout human history and will not change until the end of the world. Adam and Eve hid from God as soon as they had eaten the forbidden fruit and had seen their own nakedness. "The LORD God called Adam, and said to him, 'Where are you?' And he said, 'I heard your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself'" (Gen. 3: 9). The Apostle Paul writes that God "chose us in him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him. In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ" (Eph. 1: 4). They did not choose God for themselves. Rather, the Lord chose each of them and each of us and, in spite of our shortcomings and imperfections, calls us to follow Him.

It is worth noting how Philip responded to the call to become an apostle. Did he enroll in a seminary? Did he start going to church? Did he rush to be baptized? No. Everything comes later. His studies will last for three years and, along with everyone else, he fails his final exams. However, his name will go down in history. This inhabitant of a small Galilean village will become an apostle and a world-famous hero of the faith not because he showed greatness of mind, extraordinary abilities and talents, but because he was chosen to do the work of God. The greatness of Philip was not his personality, but his apostolic ministry.

Immediately after being called by Jesus Christ, Philip began bringing his neighbors to Christ. This is how he differs from many modern Christians. How easy it is to avoid sharing the Gospel with our neighbors by saying preaching is the duty of a priest, or to say that we lack the theological and pedagogical education needed for such a task. Or that we lack time and experience. In the example of Philip, we see, however, that only desire is important. Everything else is in God's hands.

A worker was cleaning a large mirror in a department store. The glass shone with its transparency. Only one stain could not be cleaned. When he looked more closely, the worker saw that the stain was on the inside of the glass. Likewise, many people try to wash away sins from their souls only at the level of external deeds. We forget that sin often leave hidden roots within us, in the form of thoughts and desires. Therefore, the Christian must be purified not only on the outside, but also on the inside, purifying the soul from sinful thoughts, feelings, and desires. But only Jesus Christ can help us in this. He can detect and wash away all sinful stains from our souls.

Dear Believers, very often we throw up our hands, and are overcome by reluctance or despair. Sometimes we want to give up completely and cease the struggle. This is because we are not looking at Jesus Christ, but at ourselves. Remember, however, Christ does not look at our failures. He sees us as those for whom He gave His life. He knows that we can attain Eternal Life. Therefore, whatever the circumstances of our lives, whatever failures or difficulties we may face, let us not be discouraged, let us run steadily forward, let us go to our salvation, so that one day we may, together with the Apostle Paul, say the words: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on the crown of righteousness awaits me, which the Lord, the just judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me, but to all who have longed for his appearance" (2 Tim. 4: 7-8).