

BIBLICAL PAGES

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Jesus, a man of His time and space, shows us our true and full humanity

Lectio n° 8 You will see

Introduction

“At the beginning you will sit not too close to me, in the grass. I will give a sidelong glance at you and you mustn't say anything... This is my secret. It's very simple: you cannot see but with the heart. The essential is invisible to the eyes.”
(Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, 'The Little Prince', Milan, 1986, pp. 91-98 (the meeting between the fox and the Little Prince))

These words by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, from his novel 'The Little Prince', belong to the well-known episode of the Little Prince's meeting with the fox.

They can be a worthy introduction to a well-known episode we find in St John's Gospel, that is, the meeting of Jesus with Nathanael, the 'Israelite in whom there is no deception', the one who was under the fig-tree. Here too we do find a gaze originating from the heart, and a gaze that can see into Nathanael's heart.

However, in this meeting there is much more than a simple gaze; in fact, two gazes meet and recognize each other. This is the arrival of our 'path', dealing with Jesus' gaze, a gaze full of compassion, caring for man's sorrows and sufferings, a gaze that sees both man's indifference to God and the hypocrisy of a faith paraded along.

Now Jesus' gaze enters man's heart and sees into our depths and knows us for what we really are in our humanity, weak and fragile, but trying to find out the face of God.

Let us invoke the Holy Spirit:

Holy Spirit,
come and lay into our hearts
the wish to advance
towards communion.
You are our guide.
You who love us fill the hearts
of those who are seeking peace...
And give us the ability to restore trust
wherever there may be disagreement.

God who love us,
You know our shortcomings.
However, by the presence of Your Holy Spirit,
come and transfigure them
so that shadows may be illumined from inside.
God who love us,
make us humble.
Give us a greater simplicity
in our prayer,
in our relationships,
in our welcoming others.
(Frère Roger Schutz)

1. Lectio

(to read the Word / to listen to it)

John 1:43-51

43 The next day, after Jesus had decided to leave for Galilee, He met Philip and said, 'Follow me'. 44 Philip came from the same town, Bethsaida, as Andrew and Peter. 45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth'. 46 Nathanael said to him, 'From Nazareth? Can anything good come from that place?' Philip replied, 'Come and see'. 47 When Jesus saw Nathanael coming He said of him, 'There, truly, is an Israelite in whom there is no deception'. 48 Nathanael asked, 'How do you know me?' Jesus replied, 'Before Philip came to call you, I saw you under the fig tree'. 49 Nathanael answered, 'Rabbi, You are the Son of God, You are the King of Israel'. 50 Jesus replied, 'You believe that just because I said: I saw you under the fig tree. You are going to see greater things than that.' 51 And then He added, 'In all truth I tell you, you will see Heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending over the Son of Man'.

- Let us read the text more than once, slowly and making a pause each time...
- Let us go into the text's depths.

The structure of this text can be detected through the appearances of the characters: they highlight the three meetings that make up the text and that seem to be similar to a circular path, opening and closing: Jesus-Philip / Philip-Nathanael / Nathanael-Jesus.

It is interesting to note that in the end of the second scene and in the third one, the verb 'to see' (Greek, 'horao') occurs seven times, linked to the term 'here is' (Greek, 'ide'). The resulting phrase can be rendered as 'look, behold'.

1. Jesus and Philip

43 The next day, after Jesus had decided to leave for Galilee, He met Philip and said, 'Follow me'. 44 Philip came from the same town, Bethsaida, as Andrew and Peter.

The first scene is the shortest meeting of the three: only Jesus speaks and He makes use of one single word. On the contrary, the rest is more detailed: we are given the time (“the next day”), the place (“Galilee”), the wish of the Master (“had decided to leave”), His imperative (“Follow me”), then the information about the town of Bethsaida.

2. Philip and Nathanael

45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, 'We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph, from Nazareth'. 46 Nathanael said to him, 'From Nazareth? Can anything good come from that place?' Philip replied, 'Come and see'.

In the second scene, the number of words is twice as much. The dialogue between the characters occupies the full section. Philip acts twice, Nathanael once.

After Jesus' calling, Philip meets Nathanael and relates that they have found Jesus (not vice versa, as it really happened). When Nathanael expresses his prejudice against the origin of the Messiah, Philip who is the spokesman of a common experience (“we have found”) concludes the dialogue by saying “Come and see”, an echo of the Master's words in line 39, when He had invited two disciples (Andrew and Peter) to follow Him. Both invitations (Jesus' first and now Philip's) are the answer to a question having to do with a place: “Where do You live? (1:38); “Can anything good come from Nazareth?” (1:46)

3. Nathanael and Jesus

47 When Jesus saw Nathanael coming He said of him, 'There, truly, is an Israelite in whom there is no deception'. 48 Nathanael asked, 'How do you know me?' Jesus replied, 'Before Philip came to call you, I saw you under the fig tree'. 49 Nathanael answered, 'Rabbi, You are the Son of God, You are the King of Israel'. 50 Jesus replied, 'You believe that just because I said: I saw you under the fig tree. You are going to see greater things than that.' 51 And then He added, 'In all truth I tell you, you will see Heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending over the Son of Man'.

The third scene relates the meeting between Nathanael and Jesus. Here the dialogue is more detailed than the previous one. The lines are twice as much. Nathanael speaks twice, Jesus three times, and His last speech is longer and more complex than the rest.

Nathanael follows Philip and meets Jesus: he sees Him and is seen by Him. It is interesting to point out that here there is a double movement of sight: in fact, each character sees the other and is, in his turn, seen by the other. But, according to Philip's words, the one who was supposed to see was just Nathanael.

On the contrary the text relates in an indirect way that first of all Nathanel was seen by Jesus: “When Jesus saw Nathanael coming...” (1:47); then, directly, Jesus Himself reveals that He had already seen him before, “Before Philip came to call you, I saw you...” (1:48). These two nearly identical expressions are placed at the very beginning and at the conclusion of the first part of this third scene.

Jesus gives a positive description of Nathanael’s identity: “Here is / Look, an Israelite in whom there is no deception”. The term “Here is”, in spite of being an interjection, is a sight-related term, and can be translated as “Look / Behold”. Nathanel responds by asking the Master how He does know him (‘ginosko’), but Jesus replies with the verb ‘to see’ (‘horao’): “Before Philip came to call you, I saw you...”

To recapitulate the first part of the dialogue between Jesus and Nathanael, the sight-related verbs which occur are three, all of them uttered by the Master and referred to Nathanael. This fact shows that sight and knowledge of the person are closely linked. In fact, the Master’s gaze anticipates Philip’s witness and invitation.

In the second part of the same dialogue we find a semantic development: the same gaze, Jesus’ gaze, becomes a reason to believe for Nathanael who, in his turn, thanks to his faith, will be able to see Jesus’ divinity, so much so that the text begins with Nathanael’s profession of faith in Jesus’ messianic status (“You are the Son of God”, 1:49) and ends with the self-proclamation of the same title on Jesus’ part (“Son of Man”, 1:51).

Jesus’ answer is articulated into two parts: line 51 (“you will see”) widens the addressees’ group, from Nathanael to all those who, like him, are willing to follow Philip in order to go and see (“you are going to see...”, 1:50).

“You believe that just because I said: I saw you under the fig tree. You are going to see greater things than that.” In these words, the parallelism is not given by the repetition of the verb ‘to see’, but rather by seeing and believing with no further explanation. In fact, faith precedes sight, whose object is explained through a chiasm linking the two verbs in the future tense and identifies the “greater things” with “Heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending over the Son of Man”.

“greater things” ↓ “you are going to see”
“you will see” “Heaven open...”

It was Nathanel’s faith that made visible to him that divinity in which he believed, after Jesus disclosed to him that He had anticipated him in seeing him: that gaze that preceded him was the turning point in his life.

Jesus is able to detect man’s faith. His gaze penetrates into the hearts of His interlocutors, as well as of those accompanying them, recognizing their sincere wish to be saved or, in some other cases, the attempt to put Him to the test. But what does Jesus really see? The heart seeking Him, even when this quest follows winding paths.

2. Meditatio **(to meditate on the Word / to let it resound)**

- After reading the text, let the Word resound in our hearts... Jesus' gaze sees our own hearts...

3. Oratio **(to pray the Word / to repeat it)**

Yours is a gaze full of benevolence,
O Lord Jesus our Master, preceding words.
First You love us and look at us, then You call us.
Yes, You have loved us since the beginning, You loved us first,
Yours is God's very own style.
Do not let the temptation of disbelief prevail in us,
or superficiality dry up our faith...
Let all the desires of our hearts,
those which make us positively unrestful,
overcome our doubts.
May Your Holy Spirit open up our eyes,
may He make us welcome Your living Word.
May Your loving and merciful gaze
reveal to us the grace that You are giving us.
Amen.

4. Contemplatio **(to contemplate the Word / silence)**

- In silence... we turn our inner sight to the One who spoke to us in the Beloved Son. May we be filled with gratitude, as we have been reached there, in the depth of our hearts...

5. Collatio **(to share the Word)**

- In order for the Word to become incarnate in our very lives, let us share it with the Sisters...