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Deacons in the Year of Faith: Toward a Lifetime of Faithful Service
Retreat for the Diaconal Candidates for the Archdiocese of Kansas City, KS
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Men Without Guile

- Introduction
 - It's providential that during this retreat we have a chance to ponder the life of St. Bartholomew, a holy disciple of the Lord who became a servant of the Gospel giving his life to preach it, as the great early Church historian Eusebius tells us, in India, which in ancient usage included Arabia, Ethiopia, Libya, Parthia, Persia and India proper and then Greater Armenia, where converted many people before being flayed alive by the barbarians in Albanopolis, on the west coast of the Caspian Sea. We're here today because of his work and the work of the other apostles.
 - We have the Gospel of Jesus' encounter with Nathanael because from the earliest days of the Church Nathanael (a first name which means "Given by God") and Bartholomew (an Aramaic patronym that means "Son of Tolmay") have been identified as the same person. The synoptics all mention Bartholomew, but never Nathanael; St. John uses Nathanael but never Bartholomew. And so it seems clear that the two included in the lists of apostles are almost certainly the same person.
 - In this midst of this retreat on faith, we begged the Lord at the beginning of Mass, "Strengthen in us, O Lord, the faith by which the blessed Apostle Bartholomew clung wholeheartedly to your Son." We want to cling to Christ with our whole heart, not just during a retreat but during our entire life. Today we'll ponder through the prism of his life how.
- Guileless
 - Jesus gives him a great compliment when he meets him. "Behold an Israelite in whom there is no guile." There was no deception in him. Jesus could see right away that he was forthright, honest, open, plainspoken, straightforward, upfront, earnest, innocent, and unpretentious.
 - The Suffering Servant who was prophesied by Isaiah as a man in whom "no deceit was in his mouth" (Is 53:9) recognized Bartholomew as a man praised by Psalm 32:2 "Happy are those to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit."
 - These are words that should be able to be said about each of us as Christians, but all the more as priests, deacons and deacon candidates.
 - St. Paul wrote to St. Timothy saying that deacons must not be "double-tongued" but "hold the mystery of faith with a clear conscience" (1 Tim 3:8-10). The Basic Norms for the Formation of Deacons says that "Of particular importance for deacons [is] ... that they be ... sincere in their words and heart."
 - You're preparing for candidacy tomorrow. The very word "candidacy" comes from the Latin root *candidum* which means "white, pure, sincere, honest, upright." It also flows from the verb *candere*, which means "to shine," to shine with a splendor that is as "clear as crystal," as the Book of Revelation describes the pillars and walls of the heavenly Jerusalem.
 - But the word candidate has taken on a totally different meaning in our culture. Candidates for political office are often the most dissembling, hypocritical, circuitous, and evasive people of all. They earned the term candidate because any seeker of office would wear a toga candida, a white toga, in the ancient world, but they were also called to be truthful. That's no longer the way they behave.
 - Likewise those who serve the Church should be totally sincere, men of the truth, who realize that lies flow from the Father of Lies, who is a man-killer and a liar from the beginning.
 - One of the greatest corruptions that happen in the Church is when the clergy cease telling the truth and cease to have candid consciences. It infects dioceses. People can start to gossip, to connive, to evade, as if Jesus told us something other than "let your yes mean yes and your no mean no, everything else is from the devil." We become ecclesiastical politicians rather than men of "clear conscience" who are "sincere in their words and heart."

- As we make this retreat, the words of Blessed John Paul II from Detroit ring out, in which he begged the Lord that the deacons of the US would “remain strong and steadfast in Christ, giving to the world the witness of a pure conscience.”
- The Fig Tree
 - The whole scene with St. Bartholomew takes off when Jesus said he saw him under the fig tree.
 - St. Vincent’s in KC, depicted with fig tree.
 - This has been much commented upon in the reflections of the fathers of the Church. I think Pope Benedict’s explanation of it in his 2006 catechesis on St. Bartholomew shows how important it is for us in our prayer and one day in our preaching.
 - “Jesus’ reply,” Pope Benedict said, “cannot immediately be understood. He says: ‘Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you’ (Jn 1: 48). We do not know what had happened under this fig tree. It is obvious that it had to do with a decisive moment in Nathanael’s life. His heart is moved by Jesus’ words, he feels understood and he understands: ‘This man knows everything about me, he knows and is familiar with the road of life; I can truly trust this man.’ And so he answers with a clear and beautiful confession of faith: ‘Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel! (Jn 1: 49). In this confession is conveyed a first important step in the journey of attachment to Jesus. Nathanael’s words shed light on a twofold, complementary aspect of Jesus’ identity: he is recognized both in his special relationship with God the Father, of whom he is the Only-begotten Son, and in his relationship with the People of Israel, of whom he is the declared King, precisely the description of the awaited Messiah. We must never lose sight of either of these two elements because if we only proclaim Jesus’ heavenly dimension, we risk making him an ethereal and evanescent being; and if, on the contrary, we recognize only his concrete place in history, we end by neglecting the divine dimension that properly qualifies him.
 - We all have our fig trees. Jesus sees us and knows us, and we’re called to respond to him with the same type of confession, with both elements, to relate to him in his humanity and divinity.
- The introduction to Jesus
 - A very important part of his discipleship is found in the fact that he may never have met Jesus if it weren’t for his friend Philip, who after meeting Jesus, ran to him and told him, “We have found the one about whom Moses wrote in the law, and also the prophets, Jesus.”
 - Philip couldn’t keep Jesus to himself. It’s always the way for those who truly encounter Christ.
 - After Bartholomew wondered if anything good could come from Nazareth, because there was nothing in Sacred Scripture pointing out that the Messiah would come from there.
 - Philip’s response was not to argue with him, but to introduce him to Jesus.
 - B16: “In our relationship with Jesus we must not be satisfied with words alone. In his answer, Philip offers Nathanael a meaningful invitation: "Come and see!" (Jn 1: 46). Our knowledge of Jesus needs above all a first-hand experience: someone else’s testimony is of course important, for normally the whole of our Christian life begins with the proclamation handed down to us by one or more witnesses. However, we ourselves must then be personally involved in a close and deep relationship with Jesus.”
 - This is something we don’t often get. Criticism of Pope Francis for not mentioning controversial issues in Brazil or speaking out much about them in the first five months of his pontificate. There’s a reason for it. Because he’s trying to introduce people to Jesus.
 - In *El Jesuita*, Cardinal Bergoglio was asked whether the Church preaches too much on sexual issues. His response was: “The Church preaches about what it thinks is best for people, so that they may be fulfilled, be happy. But sometimes there’s a degrading reductionism. What I mean is that the most important thing in preaching is to proclaim Jesus Christ, what in theology is called the kerygma, that Jesus Christ is God, became man to save us, lived in the world like any one of us, suffered, died, was buried and rose. This is the kerygma, the proclamation of Christ, which provokes astonishment, brings one to contemplation and to faith. Some believe immediately, like Mary Magdalene. Others believe but begin to doubt a little. Others need to put their finger in the wounds, like Thomas. Each one has his own path of arriving at faith. But the faith is the encounter with Jesus. ... After the encounter with Jesus comes reflection, which is the work of catechesis, reflection about God, Christ and the Church, where one can deduce the principles of religious and moral behavior.... Generally I

have observed in some well known Christian circles a weakening of the religious sense because of the absence of a living of the faith. ... There is no attention to the kerygma and everything quickly passes to catechesis, especially to morality. It's enough to listen to some homilies that should be kerygmatic with some catechesis, but end up being about morality and above all catechetical. And within the subject of morality... one prefers to speak about sexual morality, about anything that has any connection at all to sex, this one can do, this one can't, one's guilty about this, not guilty about that. When this happens, we bury the treasure of the living Jesus, the treasure of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, the treasure of the project of Christian life that has many other aspects beyond sexual questions. We push to the side a rich catechesis, with the mysteries of faith, the Creed, and we center ourselves in whether we should organize a rally against a political proposal to legalize condoms."

- Bartholomew sought to do the same, bring people to Jesus.
- "Your friends make known, O Lord, the glorious splendor of your kingdom." He was a true friend.
 - B16: we can say that despite the scarcity of information about him, St Bartholomew stands before us to tell us that attachment to Jesus can also be lived and witnessed to without performing sensational deeds. Jesus himself, to whom each one of us is called to dedicate his or her own life and death, is and remains extraordinary.
- Skin in the game.
 - Most famous iconography is of his holding his skin. Michelangelo prominently featured it in the Last Judgment, putting his own face on St. Bartholomew right near the throne of Jesus. Bernini's pupils famously executed his design in the tremendous statue of St. Bartholomew at the front of the basilica of St. John Lateran, so that all of us entering that Church would know that our skin is meant to be in the game, just as Bartholomew's was. His martyrdom was just the culmination of a life giving in union to God from his heart to his dermis. It's an example for us all.
- Jacob's ladder
 - Jesus promised at the end of this scene that Bartholomew would see Jacob's ladder, the ladder that Jesus had come to establish between heaven and earth by means of his Cross.
 - Bartholomew was present at the first Mass. He had his feet washed by the Lord and was instructed to do likewise to others. He received Jesus' body and blood in the Upper Room. He, in turn, celebrated Mass for the first Christians and likely for the Blessed Virgin.
 - He's with us now seeking to strengthen us by faith so that we may love the Lord as wholeheartedly as he did, all the days of our life.