

Reflection for the Eighteenth Sunday of Trinity John 1: 47-end

We might wonder why we have this noticeably short gospel passage this Sunday. The reason is that we are remembering Michael and All Angels. Why so short could be another question. Once more it is helpful to look back to see the context; Jesus is calling the twelve disciples to Him. He has already called Simon Peter and Andrew, then he calls Phillip, who calls Nathaniel. Nathaniel adds the touch of humour by asking if anything good can come out of Nazareth. Just the sort of thing one of us might say, it shows that the disciples chosen by God retained their humanity and a sense of humour. Jesus recognises Nathaniel as an upright, honest, and straight forward man. Nathaniel is amazed that Jesus seems to know Him before they have even met. Jesus reassures him that he, Nathaniel, will see greater things. The selection of the twelve is of significant importance. Jesus does not just wander around picking this one and that saying, "You look like a likely lad, you will do, follow me." The selection of the twelve has been preordained, they have been chosen by God, selected before they knew it. Later they are called Apostles which means chosen by God. Jesus tells Nathaniel that he will see heaven opened and the angels of God descending and ascending from heaven. This is a reference to the story of Jacob's ladder. Jacob in a time of hardship sees this vision of a ladder going up to heaven with the angels going up and down, a reminder that God is everywhere and that His messengers are everywhere doing His will. Jesus is reminding Nathaniel of the connections to the past as he is looking to the future. Now we can see why this reading was chosen for St Michael and All Angels. It is the angelic connection that we have.

We may find the thought of ladders going up into heaven and angels with gossamer wings a little fanciful these days. However, the reality of God revealed to us in Jesus is not so fanciful any more than the possibility of direct access to God should be. God who is already more ready to listen than we are to engage. The physical ladder is symbolic to illustrate this concept. The angels with gossamer wings and white robes may be a little more earthy than we realise. We are told that God has no hands and feet but ours. Ours is the task to do God's work in whatever way we can, be it in a small way or a larger way. We must be ready to do God's bidding, which may not come in a flash of lightening but just that gentle nudge in our minds telling us that we ought to be doing something.

*Lord, grant that I may always allow myself to be guided by you,
Always follow your plans, and perfectly accomplish your holy will.
Grant that in all things, great and small,
today and all the days of my life,
I may do whatever you require of me.*

Teresa of Avila