

The Festival of St. Bartholomew, Apostle
St. Luke 22:24-30
24 August, Anno Domini 2025

Beloved people of God,

To be a Christian is to be a priest. Several times in Scripture, God's people are referred to as priest. At Mt. Sinai, God told the Israelites that if they would obey His voice they would be "a kingdom of priests." (Ex. 19:6) Three times in the revelation granted to St. John, Christians are referred to as "priests to God". (Rev. 1:6, 5:10, 20:6). In the Old Testament priests had essentially three duties - intercede for man before God, offer sacrifices, and separate what is clean from what is unclean.

In light of our observance this day of the Festival of St. Bartholomew, I want to focus our attention on the priestly duty of offering sacrifices. Thanks be to God, we are no longer called upon to slay animals and cover everything in their blood. Such sacrifices are no longer needed since "when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of His own Blood, thus securing an eternal redemption." (Heb. 9:11-12) Instead, you and I are now duty-bound to offer the sacrifices of praise and ourselves.

St. Bartholomew, whose martyrdom we commemorate this day, knew such sacrifice well. Bartholomew, otherwise known as Nathanael, is perhaps best known as the disciple who was called by Philip to come and see the Christ. And as he heeded that call, though questioning whether anything good could come out of Nazareth, Christ said of Bartholomew "An Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit." (Jan 1:47) Bartholomew's skepticism of Philip's testimony quickly gave way to his full-throated confession that Jesus was the Son of God and the King of Israel - the Messiah. And that would remain Bartholomew's confession to the very bitter end of his earthly life. He clung to the sacrifice of our Great High Priest, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He believed that his own sins were forgiven by the Blood of Jesus and his certainty of this truth gave him zeal and boldness to go forth into the world offering his very existence in service to the Gospel. Bartholomew is believed to have traveled into Armenia with the good news of salvation where he was blessed to offer up his body to a martyr's death, confessing the name of Christ even as they pulled the skin from his body! It was no loss to Bartholomew, though, as he was granted the crown of everlasting life and

the throne promised to him by Christ, who had laid down His own life for Bartholomew.

Indeed, the life of a Christian is one of sacrifice so that others may benefit, exactly contrary to everything our flesh wants. Perhaps that may be the sacrifice of our life in martyrdom but certainly the sacrifice of our pride, our vain ambition, and our ego. Bartholomew and his brother apostles were roundly chastised by Christ for their petty bickering over who was to be the greatest and who would rise to the top of the heap after Jesus' death and that right after Christ had washed their feet and instituted the very supper which conveyed to them and now us the fruits of Jesus' great humility!

Oh, how our sinful flesh hates sacrifice. It does not want to be less or have less. It is appalled at the notion that we should be called to go without or be inconvenienced. We want success. We want ease. We want to be the greatest. We don't want to be burdened and we certainly don't want to bear one another's burdens. We are quick to abandon those who are struggling or who don't meet our expectations, who don't behave like we want, who aren't capable of giving us what we want, the way we want it. We would just as soon write them off and leave them rather than do the hard and painful work of crucifying our own pride and wisdom and struggle with them to help them and share their weakness as our own and remain united to them.

Repent. Christ didn't humble Himself and take on our flesh and take up His very literal cross so that we could chase after bigger and better or so that we could lay down our crosses, which only ever means that we lay those crosses on someone else and demand that they carry them for us. Crosses are always and only instruments of death. And your heavenly Father graciously prepares and delivers your crosses to you in order that the sin and doubt and unbelief that remain your heart may be crucified. By daily contrition and repentance, as you make that most beautiful sign of the holy cross upon yourself, reminding you that the Lord Jesus has born the cross of God's wrath and you with Him by virtue of your Baptism, you slay again that Old Adam who is only interested in himself and how he can be helped and his situation improved. The Old Adam gives no thought to his neighbor or the whole body of Christ. Rather he shrugs his shoulders at his neighbor's plight. He sees their need and believes that he has done his Christian duty by praying that God would feed and clothe them though offering them nothing of his own. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Christ Jesus, the Lord of heaven and earth came precisely to put such demonic

wickedness to death. He died to set us free from our slavery to self and the completely backwards idea that the highest virtue of man is to seek greatness - to have the most, be the most, and suffer the least. Christ came for the sick, the weak, the broken. If that is not true, than you and I have no Savior and we are condemned to eternal judgment.

But it is true! Christ Jesus came into the world to save wretched, pathetic, bumbling, sinners! Rather than turn away from us in disgust because we didn't have good enough to offer Him and He's got a far better thing going in heaven, He drew as near to us as possible to give Himself to us - He became one of us. God took our flesh and united it to His divine being for the express purpose of lifting us out of death by casting Himself into death in our place. He didn't simply help us bear our burden. He bore the whole burden for us.

This sacrificial and humble mind of Christ is precisely what we pray for when we sing "Create in me a new heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." This is what the Holy Spirit commands us through the apostle Paul saying "Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:5-8) In no way are we to seek out greatness for ourselves. That is to clamor over our neighbor and despise him. We are to be priests. We are to sacrifice, not goats and bulls, but ourselves. Having been raised from eternal death and been made sons of God and given seats at His table, we are to follow Christ's examples as true sons, offering up our whole body, soul, heart, mind, and possessions to strengthen and support our neighbor. This will most certainly cost you. It will be inconvenient. But if we despise the weak, especially those of the household of faith, then we will be despised by Christ unto eternal death.

The body of Christ will never look sleek and strong. As our Savior had no form or beauty that we should desire Him, so neither do His beloved children. Bartholomew, his brother apostles, and we with them are not great. But we know One who is and He is always among us as the one who serves, who gives of His whole self for our good, giving us even to eat of His sacred Body and drink of His precious Blood. And He is at His most beautiful in our eyes as He sacrificed Himself on the cross for our sins. Likewise, we are at our greatest when we count ourselves as nothing and others as more important than ourselves - priests after the

image of the Great High Priest, our Lord Jesus Christ.

God grant that having that same mind of Christ and filled with the joy of our salvation, we with Bartholomew may rejoice to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, so that the whole body of Christ might be built up into a spiritual house, a holy priesthood to our God.

In the Name of +Jesus.

Pastor Ulmer

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus our Lord.