

Like a child, Nathanael, sees clearly – which doesn't mean he always gets it right. He's clearly prejudiced against Nazareth in this gospel account and fails at first to understand who Jesus really is but he's willing to meet him, to 'come and see'. This is Jesus' invitation to us all: the narrative of our lives: keep searching: don't take any day for granted: there's something new in it which will surprise you – something new in it to discover both about oneself and God. This search for truth inspires both avowedly secular lives and those of a more religious persuasion but it's the same quest and essentially spiritual – open, that is, to 'inspiration'. Some people are particularly prone to its pursuit, nature already equipping them with a bias towards truth, a desire to see clearly. This may not always advance their careers. It can make them difficult to get along with – refusing, as they do, to go along with the deceptions and conceits of society which so readily consume us. I'm thinking of our willingness to conform to social norms in order to 'get on' which is as prevalent in the Church as anywhere and I'm reminded of one of our former monks in Italy, Luigi Gioia, who eventually had had enough of it all and left. Here's a taste of his 'clear-seeing' from the Tablet earlier this year:

I looked for advice and support in the Church, but I found only (Sometimes indulgent) intransigence or, more often than not, sheer frivolity. The most baffling to me was the latter: as long as you are not found out, I was often told, do as you please or feel or need. Relapses of guilt will become more and more rare, until you end up leading a double life without even realising how you got there in the first place.

That's a chilling reminder of how we can easily exchange clear sight for double vision, the search for the truth for the search instead for self-indulgence and a whole catena of lies which entrap us. Nathanael hasn't quite got it right yet – seeing Jesus as the Son of God and King of Israel are steps on the way but his search, his willingness to 'come and see', will eventually lead him to that vision of heaven where he will know Jesus, will know God, as fully as he is already known himself. But, if Bartholomew and Nathanael are one and the same, it will be a martyrdom, too.

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