

Pro-Cathedral

5 January 2022

Welcome

We've been listening over the last few days to the second part of John chapter 1. It tells a story of gathering energy. An individual is attracted to Jesus. They somehow can't hold it in and they go and proclaim Jesus to a relative or a friend. In yesterday's Gospel Andrew became a disciple and then he called his brother Peter. In today's Gospel, we hear of Philip and Nathanael – apostles we don't hear much of.

Topic

John's Gospel is like a big jigsaw puzzle or a mosaic. Every detail has its place and its purpose. So what about the fig tree? Why does Jesus say, I saw you under the fig tree?

Steps

In the story of the garden of Eden, in the book of Genesis, the tree of knowledge of good and evil is mentioned. It does not say which kind of tree it was. In our tradition, it was taken to be an apple tree, because in Latin the word for evil, malum, is also the word for an apple. The ancient rabbis went at it differently. They observed that the first species of tree mentioned Genesis 1-2 is the fig tree, because Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves together. The Rabbis not unreasonably concluded that the tree of knowledge of good and evil was a fig tree.

Then they made a jump. In the Jewish tradition, knowledge of good and evil comes from the Bible. So the Bible guides us in our knowledge of good and evil and is, so to speak, our tree of knowledge. When Nathanael was "sitting under a fig tree" this means, in reality, he was on a quest for God and goodness and as part of that quest he was searching the Scriptures. So Jesus calls someone already on his own spiritual journey. Because Jesus has recognised Nathanael as a spiritual pilgrim, he responds enthusiastically: Rabbi, you are the Son of God, you are the King of Israel.

The Gospel of John goes on then to tell of many more individuals on a spiritual quest: Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the Roman centurion, the man born blind, Mary and Martha and, not least, Mary Magdalen.

Conclusion

All these characters are summoned up to encourage us on our own spiritual journey, our own quest for God and for goodness. On that journey, we search the Scriptures, we pray, we hold ourselves open to the presence and call of Jesus. May we hear his voice when he calls us. May we have the courage to share our discovery with others! Amen.