

Come and See

John 1:43-51

It's natural to wonder whether God really hears us when we pray, to wonder if He even knows who we are out of the more than six billion humans who call this small blue planet home.

King David, in the Psalms, spoke of a God who knew David's innermost being, who knew him before he was even born. "You knit me together in my mother's womb," David prayed. "If I fly on the wings of the dawn to dwell in the deepest reaches of the sea, even there Your hand would find me." Once God knows us this intimately, we can't even flee from Him. Quite the opposite, when in danger or fear, we should flee to Him, to the One who already understands.

Young Samuel did not yet know the Lord, but nevertheless we're told that God knew Samuel, and called out to him at night by name. Word from the Lord was rare in those days, and visions were uncommon. God called him while still a youth to be the last judge of Israel, and Samuel would later call the nation to repentance before the time of judges gave way to the age of the kings. God knows and calls out to us long before we know Him, and He has plans for our future.

When Jesus met the Samaritan woman at the well, He knew before she even spoke that she had had five husbands, and was not married to the man with whom she was living. She knew no ordinary stranger could have known so much about her. "Sir," she said to Jesus, "I perceive that You are a Prophet." Little did she know.

What do these examples tell us? Our lives are an open book to God. Before we have even heard of Him, He knows us, knows our thoughts, knows what we're going to say before we open our mouth. The days of our existence were all planned by Him before we even saw our first day. The hairs on our head are numbered by God, (even if some of us have a few numbers missing). Jesus told the disciples that not even a sparrow can fall to the ground without God knowing about it, and each of us is worth far more to Him than many sparrows.

That level of transparency has radical implications for our lives. Why should we hesitate for a moment to tell the Lord what we need, once we realize He already knows and is simply waiting for us to ask? Why be afraid to confess our sins to Him, when He has known the worst of it ever since the moment it happened and is waiting with open arms to reconcile with us? How would our prayer life, our relationship with God, change once we understand that our lives are in fact a total open book to Him?

Neither is this wondrous knowledge a one-way street. God sometimes imparts profound knowledge of Himself to us in our inner being, knowledge that we could have learned no other way. When Simon Peter declared to Jesus, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus replied that "flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father which is in heaven."

Philip and his friend Nathaniel had an

up-close encounter with God's intimate knowledge in today's Gospel.

Jesus had already called Andrew and Simon Peter, both fishermen from Bethsaida. It was a fishing village, and even the name "Bethsaida" meant "home of the fishermen." When Jesus decided to head toward Galilee, before He left He found Philip, another young man from Bethsaida, and said to him, "Follow Me."

Philip immediately rushed out to find his friend Nathaniel (also called Bartholomew elsewhere in the Scriptures), and excitedly told him about the Master. "We have found the One of whom Moses and the prophets wrote," He told Nathaniel. "Jesus bar-Joseph, from Nazareth." How did Philip know so quickly that Jesus was the Messiah foretold by Moses and the ancient prophets? Had God spoken to him in his inner being about this Man from Nazareth, who told him simply, "Follow Me"?

In Jesus' day, Nazareth was looked down upon as a tiny, unimportant "hick" town of loose morals, and Nathaniel thought that one fact told him everything he needed to know about Philip's new teacher. Based on local gossip, and perhaps a dash of prejudice, Nathaniel assumed Jesus was probably a disreputable character from out in the "sticks" and asked Philip, "Since when does anything good come from Nazareth?"

Philip's answer was exactly the right one -- "Come and see for yourself." Nathaniel did.

"Now, there's an honest man," Jesus exclaimed as Nathaniel approached, "a true Israelite in whom there is no guile."

Nathaniel was curious. "How do You know me?" he asked. Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree, before Philip called you."

This statement so stunned Nathaniel that

he blurted out, "You are the Son of God, the King of Israel!" Had God spoken to Nathaniel's heart as He did to Simon Peter and to Philip? How else could he have had this sudden revelation that Jesus was the Messiah?

"Because I said I saw you under the fig tree, you believe?" Jesus asked. "You're going to see greater things than this!" (Or to put it into more modern language, "You ain't seen nothing yet" -- true, because Nathaniel would be given the privilege of seeing the risen Jesus on the beach of Tiberias in the days following the resurrection.) "Before this is over," Jesus promised, "you'll see Heaven open up and the angels ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Some see in Jesus' statement the image of a king dispatching couriers and ambassadors to distant lands, and receiving them back again. After Pentecost, Nathaniel would become just such an ambassador, preaching the Gospel to Ethiopia, Persia and Armenia, and a courier, carrying a translation of the Gospel of Matthew to India. All because he accepted Philip's challenge to "come and see for yourself." In the electric moment of meeting the Master, his solitary path had converged with the Father's plan. The life of Nathaniel was known by Jesus before they had ever met, and their encounter would change his life forever.

