

Sunday 24 August 2025
St Bartholomew

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Isaiah 43:8-13

NT: Acts 5:12-16

Gp: Luke 22:24-30

Today, we gather with joy to celebrate the feast of St Bartholomew, one of the twelve apostles, whose life and witness illuminate the mystery of discipleship and the call of Jesus to each one of us. On this sacred day, as the summer sunlight bathes our church and the liturgical calendar points us to this humble but courageous follower of Jesus, let us open our hearts to the lessons that St Bartholomew's journey offers to all who seek to walk in the light of the Lord.

The Bible is often silent about St Bartholomew's words and deeds. In fact, in the synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—he appears in the lists of apostles, but we do not hear detailed stories of his actions or teachings. Many biblical scholars believe Bartholomew is the same person as Nathanael, whom we meet in the Gospel according to John.

Let us remember the story from John's Gospel (John 1:43-51). Philip, moved by his encounter with Jesus, finds Nathanael and declares, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." Nathanael responds with scepticism: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip, undeterred, simply says, "Come and see."

As Nathanael approaches, Jesus greets him warmly, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!" Surprised, Nathanael asks, "How do you know me?" Jesus answers, "Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you." In that moment of divine insight, Nathanael's scepticism melts away, and he confesses, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

In this brief but profound exchange, we see the heart of St Bartholomew's (Nathanael's) vocation—a person both honest and open, sceptical but willing to seek and to see, ultimately transformed by the encounter with Jesus.

Bartholomew's initial scepticism is not a weakness—it is a mark of his authenticity. He does not pretend to believe; he asks questions, he voices doubt, he desires the truth. In a world where faith can sometimes feel like an inherited costume or a social obligation, Bartholomew's honest searching encourages us to be real with God.

How often do we bring our genuine questions, our honest doubts, into our life of prayer? Are we willing, like Bartholomew, to approach Jesus with our uncertainties, trusting that Jesus's love can meet us even there?

Jesus meets Bartholomew not with rebuke, but with recognition. “Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!” Our Lord delights in sincerity. True faith is not the absence of questions, but trust in Jesus who knows us, sees us, and calls us by name.

“Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.” These words are an invitation to all of us to remember that we are known by God more deeply than we can fathom. Before we speak, before we act, before we even know ourselves, God’s gaze is upon us with love and understanding.

For Bartholomew, this knowledge is transformative. It is the moment of encounter with divine grace—the moment when all defences fall away and we stand, known and loved, before the face of God. In that sacred space, our past disappointments, our present struggles, our hidden hopes—all these are embraced by Jesus.

Today, on St Bartholomew’s feast, we are called to enter that same encounter. What is your “fig tree”? Where do you feel alone, or unseen? It could be that you are lonely, suffering with an illness, have lost a job or a loved one, in debt or facing homelessness. Know that Jesus sees you there. He knows your story. He calls you to himself, not despite your questions and struggles, but through them.

St Bartholomew was not only known and called by Jesus—he was sent. Tradition tells us that after Jesus’s resurrection and ascension, Bartholomew, like the other apostles, travelled far and wide, bearing the Good News of Jesus Christ. Some traditions say he preached in India, others in Armenia, where he is believed to have suffered martyrdom for his faith.

Bartholomew’s witness is that of faithfulness until the end. He did not seek glory or recognition. He did not leave behind eloquent letters or stirring sermons. His legacy is one of steadfast presence, humble service, and courageous proclamation.

We, too, are sent. Our call may not take us to distant lands, but each of us has an “apostolate”—a place where Jesus sends us to witness, through word and deed, to the love that has transformed us.

Bartholomew is a patron for all who serve without fanfare, all whose names are listed but whose stories are not told. The Church has always been built not only on the great preachers and miracle-workers, but also—and perhaps especially—on those who quietly, faithfully, and humbly follow Jesus.

Perhaps your life feels ordinary, your contributions small. Take heart! In the kingdom of God, every act of love, every moment of faithfulness, is precious. Everyone here at Liverpool Parish Church have worked extremely hard during our interregnum, to keep things not just ‘ticking along’ but flourishing. The church is made up of many members and all must work

together to build up the church and to spread the Gospel. Bartholomew reminds us that Jesus sees and values every disciple.

“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Nathanael’s question echoes through time. How often do we look at the humble, the overlooked, the broken, and ask the same? How often do we doubt the possibility of God’s grace suddenly emerging in unexpected places?

But God delights in surprises. Jesus, the Saviour of the world, came from Nazareth—a backwater town, despised and ignored. St Bartholomew’s story is an invitation to see with new eyes, to expect God’s glory in unlikely places—in the stranger and the common tasks of daily life.

Let us not let our expectations, our prejudices, our cynicism, blind us to the presence of Jesus in our midst. The media tells us about protests and marches against immigration, and this was happening in our own city yesterday. Let us pray for peace and tolerance, for an understanding of people’s need to live in safety and freedom.

As we celebrate this feast, let us ask the intercession of St Bartholomew, apostle and martyr. Let us pray for the courage to seek the truth, to be authentic in our faith, to receive the gaze of Jesus who knows us, and to accept our calling to go into a world that needs the Good News.

May we be, like Bartholomew, people of sincerity, open to God’s surprises. May we trust that we are known and loved by Jesus, and may we be faithful in our witness—wherever we are sent.

And as we come to the altar today, receiving the Body and Blood of Jesus, let us remember: the one who calls, knows, and sends us is ever faithful.

Mthr Jennifer Brady