

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

November 5, 2017

Spiritual Ponderings

Apostles

I am constantly amazed at how God speaks to us through the Sacred Scripture. His Word is old and yet new all at the same time. It is meant for all to read and hear and yet through prayer, it can speak to me and to the challenges of my life. With all of this in mind and with an appreciation for the evangelists who wrote the Scripture and awe for God the divine author of the same words, I would like to share with you how the Apostles help influence my life as a Christian and in my pursuit of holiness.

(1) Peter/Simon

Many books have been written about St. Peter or at least have large sections devoted to his life. I am particularly fond of Bishop Sheen's account of Peter's life in his book: *A Priest is not His Own*. By tying the story of Peter walking on the water (Matthew 14:22-33) with the story of Peter at the end of John's Gospel (Chapter 21), I see in Peter a great development in his faith. In the first passage, I see Saint Peter trying to be showy in his faith by asking God to help him do something big like walk on the water. In the story that takes place after the Resurrection Peter no longer seems concerned about appearance or flashiness. When he discovers that he is in one place and Jesus is in another place, Peter wastes no time in trying to reach Jesus. I use this story to help motivate me to do whatever I need to do to be close to Christ even if I am going to end up looking like a fool to others.

PRAYER TO ST PETER THE APOSTLE

O blessed St Peter, head and chief of the Apostles, thou art the guardian of the keys of the heavenly kingdom, and against thee the powers of hell do not prevail; thou art the rock of the Church and the shepherd of Christ's flock; thou art great in power, wonderful in thy heavenly bliss; thou hast the right of binding and loosing in heaven and on earth. The sea supported thy footsteps, the sick upon whom even thy shadow fell were cured of their ills. By the memory of that right hand which supported thee on the waves of the sea, lift me from the ocean of my sins, and by those tears which thou didst shed for thy Lord, break the bonds of my offences and free me from the hand of all my adversaries. Help even me, O good shepherd, that I may in this life serve Christ Jesus and thee, that with thy help, after the close of a good life, I may deserve to attain the reward of eternal happiness in heaven, where thou art unto endless ages the guardian of the gates and the shepherd of the flock. Amen.

(2) Andrew

Andrew, Peter's brother, whom we hear in St. John's Gospel (John 1:40) was the first Apostle to follow Jesus, teaches me through his life about humility. In spite of the fact that he was the first apostle to follow Christ, he is often left out from the core group. For example, Peter, James and John are the ones Jesus takes with Him for the Transfiguration (Matthew 17) and the curing of the official's daughter (Mark 5:31). Andrew is never recorded as complaining. When I see, others being promoted or getting special treatment, I pray to St. Andrew for help and assistance in remaining humble.

Prayer to St. Andrew:

O Glorious Saint Andrew, you were the first to recognize and follow the Lamb of God. With your friend Saint John you remained with Jesus for that first day, for your entire life, and now throughout eternity. As you led your brother Saint Peter to Christ and many others after him, draw us also to Him. Teach us to lead others to Christ solely out of love for Him and dedication in His service. Help us to learn the lesson of the Cross and to carry our daily crosses without complaint so that they may carry us to Jesus.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

November 12, 2017

Spiritual Ponderings

Apostles

Let us continue to look deeper at the Apostles.

(3) James and John

I love reflecting on the life of these two brothers and seeing the changes Jesus brings about in their lives. We know from the beginning that they both have fiery tempers (Mark 3:17). It appears that they also had a really hard time understanding Christ teaching about what it means to be great in the kingdom of God as they are power seekers (Matthew 20:19). In addition, they fell asleep in the garden despite being singled out for the special honor (Mark 14:33) and like the rest of the apostles, they abandon Jesus during His crucifixion although John did come back. Focusing on their sins and faults helps me become even more amazed at who they become because of their encounter with Christ. James becomes the first apostle martyr and John goes on to become the mystical evangelists who writes a Gospel, three letters, and the Book of Revelation. If God can transform them, I have hope that he can transform me into who I am supposed to be.

Prayer to St. James:

O glorious Apostle, St. James, who by reason of thy fervent and generous heart was chosen by Jesus to be a witness of His glory on Mount Tabor, and of His agony in Gethsemane; Thou, whose very name is a symbol of warfare and victory: obtain for us strength and consolation in the unending warfare of this life, that, having constantly and generously followed Jesus, we may be victors in the strife and deserve to receive the victor's crown in heaven.
Amen.

Prayer to St. John:

O Glorious Saint John, you were so loved by Jesus that you merited to rest your head upon his breast, and to be left in his place as a son to Mary. Obtain for us an ardent love for Jesus and Mary. Let me be united with them now on earth and forever after in heaven.

Matthew/Levi

When I reflect on the life of Matthew, I turn to a passage of Scripture that does not mention him. Instead I turn to John 12:3-6: "Mary took a liter of costly perfumed oil made from genuine aromatic nard and anointed the feet of Jesus and dried them with her hair; the house was filled with the fragrance of the oil. Then Judas the Iscariot, one [of] his disciples, and the one who would betray him, said, "Why was this oil not sold for three hundred days' wages and given to the poor?" He said this not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief and held the money bag and used to steal the contributions."

As I pray over this passage again and again, I realize that Matthew would have been the better choice to hold onto the common purse because as a tax collector he would have been good at matters dealing with money. I see Matthew not being in charge of the money as an example of someone choosing to avoid the near temptation of sin. Therefore, I ask Matthew to help me to avoid the near occasions of sin. I don't ask him to help me avoid sin but I insist on him helping me avoid the near occasion of sin. Would Judas had become a traitor if he had followed Matthew's example?

Prayer to St. Matthew

O Glorious St. Matthew, in your Gospel you portray Jesus as the longed-for Messiah who fulfilled the Prophets of the Old Covenant and as the new Lawgiver who founded a Church of the New Covenant. Obtain for us the grace to see Jesus living in his Church and to follow his teachings in our lives on earth so that we may live forever with him in heaven.

James

There is very little known about second James (a.k.a. James the Less) but this does not prevent him from being a role model for us through the grace of God. I have taken James as a model for me as an example of what it means to simply be a follower of Jesus humbly without looking for any sort of outside recognition. James was simply happy doing Jesus' will and I pray to St. James the Less asking his help to have a servant heart's that does not seek recognition.

Prayer to St. James the Less

O Glorious St. James, you were our Lord's cousin and at the same time his friend and follower. You wrote that every good and perfect gift comes to us from the Father of lights, and that faith without works is useless. You preached the divinity of Jesus until your death as a martyr. Obtain for us from the Father of lights the great gift of a living faith in Jesus' divinity

which will inspire us to unstinting labor in the service of God and our fellow human beings and enable us to reach our heavenly destiny.

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

November 19, 2017

Spiritual Ponderings

Apostles

Let us continue to take a closer look at the Apostles.

Bartholomew/Nathaniel

In John 1:43-55 we hear the call story of Nathaniel. The story invites us to see Nathaniel as a person who has certain prejudices against people from Nazareth - "Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come from Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.'" (46). Nathanael over comes his own personal biases and the temptation to simply dismiss Jesus and in his encounter with the Lord he is forever changed. Praying over the life of Nathaniel in the Scripture helps me realize that God can help me overcome my personal sins (demons).

St. Bartholomew

O Glorious St. Bartholomew, Jesus called you a person without guile and you saw in this word a sign that he was the Son of God and King of Israel. Obtain for us the grace to be ever guileless and innocent as doves. At the same time, help us to have your gift of faith to see the Divine hand in the events of daily life. May we discern the signs of the times that lead to Jesus on earth and will eventually unite us to him forever in heaven.

Simon

Most Scripture scholars that I have read believe that Simon had some connection to a political party that desired to have the Romans ousted from Israel. I wonder therefore what he must have thought of Jesus' selection of Matthew as an apostle. I assume overtime that they came to have a mutual love and respect for each other. This meant that Simon would have had to let Matthew's past remain in the past. In a real sense, he would have to love his enemy until his enemy became his friend. In my life, I have come to believe that God forgives us much easier than we forgive one another. We often like to dredge each other's pasts us in order to use as a weapon against the other person. Would our world be experiencing peace if we all followed the example of Simon and Matthew and united ourselves to Jesus and left our pasts in the pasts? When I think about bringing up someone's past, I ask Simon to help me to discern whether or not I am doing it to help the other person or to hurt the other person.

Prayer to St. Simon

O Glorious St. Simon, you were a cousin of Jesus and a devoted follower as well. You were called "the Zealot," indicating that you were willing to give your life for your religion and your freedom as a human person. Obtain for us the grace to be willing to give our lives for Christ and to labor for the freedom and peace that only God can give. Help us to spend ourselves for God on earth and be received by him in eternal bliss in heaven.

Jude

We do not know much about St. Jude from the Scripture and often when we do read about him, it is to only state that he was not the one who betrayed Jesus. He has also become the patron of lost causes. For some reason, in my mind when I add these things together, I find myself praying to St. Jude to help me be myself. I feel like St. Jude over his life time learn to appreciate his role in the Church and he was glad that he did not have the other Judas's role.

Prayer to St. Jude

Most holy Apostle, Saint Jude Thaddeus, friend of Jesus, I place myself in your care at this difficult time. Help me know that I need not face my troubles alone. Please join me in my need, asking God to send me: consolation in my sorrow, courage in my fear, and healing in the midst of my suffering. Ask our loving Lord to fill me with the grace to accept whatever may lie ahead for me and my loved ones, and to strengthen my faith in God's healing powers. Thank you, Saint Jude Thaddeus, for the promise of hope you hold out to all who believe, and inspire me to give this gift of hope to others as it has been given to me.

V. Saint Jude, Apostle of Hope R. Pray for us!

Fr. Thomas M. Pastorius

November 26, 2017

Spiritual Ponderings

Apostles

Continuing our look at the Apostles

Phillip

I know that St. Andrew is known for bringing people to Jesus but Phillip is also recorded as bringing many people to Jesus also. What I think about when it comes to Phillip is not his ability to bring others to Jesus but the time in which Jesus kind of scolded him for not yet getting it. "Philip said to him, 'Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us.'" Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (John 14:8-9). I find great comfort that he did not understand everything that Jesus was trying to reveal and it gives me hope that if the Lord did not give up on Philip or the other disciples that He will not give up on me.

Prayer to St. Philip the Apostle , for Aid

Look down from heaven, holy father, from the loftiness of that mountain to the lowliness of this valley; from that harbor of quietness and tranquility to this calamitous sea. And now that the darkness of this world hinders no more those benignant eyes of thine from looking clearly into all things, look down and visit, O most diligent keeper, that vineyard which thy right hand planted with so much labor, anxiety and peril. To thee, then, we fly; from thee we seek for aid; to thee we give our whole selves unreservedly; thee we adopt for our patron and defender. Undertake the cause of our salvation, protect thy clients; to thee kindest of rulers, we give up the rudder of our lives; steer this little ship of thine, and, placed as thou art on high, keep us off all the rocks of evil desires, and with thee for our pilot and our guide we may safely come to the port of eternal bliss. Amen.

Thomas/Didymus

I have always taken Thomas the Apostle as my patron saint and so you could say I have a special fondness for him. I do believe that he gets a bad rap in John's Gospel for not believing the other Apostles about the resurrection. If Christ had truly risen why were the Apostles still in the Upper Room with the doors locked? What I really like about Thomas though is that he is the first apostle that realizes that following Jesus means dying to oneself: "Jesus said this, and then told them, 'Our friend Lazarus is asleep, but I am going to awaken him.' So, the disciples said to him, "Master, if he is asleep, he will be saved.' But Jesus was talking about his death, while they thought that he meant ordinary sleep. So, then Jesus said to them clearly, 'Lazarus has died. And I am glad for you that I was not there, that you may believe. Let us go to him.'" Thomas, called Didymus, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go to die with him." Every time I think of my patron saint, I am reminded of my need to die with Christ.

Dear Saint Thomas,

You were once slow in believing that Christ had gloriously risen; but later, because you had seen him, you exclaimed: "My Lord and my God!" According to an ancient story, you rendered most powerful assistance for constructing a church in a place where pagan priests opposed it. Please bless architects, builds and carpenters that through them the Lord may be honored.-Amen

Matthias

I wanted to include Mathias in my list of Apostles because he is a reminder to me of my need to be ready to step up. Matthias, we learn in the Acts of the Apostles has been a longtime disciple of Jesus and now with the death of Judas is asked to take on a leadership role within the community (Acts 1:15&ff). There are times in which I am comfortable in my own little parish and I do not want to add anything else to my list of duties despite knowing that the larger Church (normally the diocese) needs someone to serve the people of God in a special way. For example, in addition to being pastor of my parish, I am also the lead priest for Project Rachel in my diocese. Moments when I feel God calling me to do something more, especially if it is outside my comfort zone, that I turn to St. Matthias for spiritual encouragement.

I am going to conclude my reflection on the spiritual insights I gain from pondering the life of the Apostles by saying one thing about Judas who became a traitor. Judas is for me a warning sign and the warning is this, I will end up physically and spiritually dead if I try to do things my way instead of God's way. It is therefore very important for me to follow Jesus example of love and to allow Him to transform me instead of just going through the motions as I assume Judas did.

A Prayer to St. Matthias the Apostle, for the Church

O Almighty God, who into the place of Judas didst choose thy faithful servant Matthias to be of the number of the Twelve: Grant that thy Church, being delivered from false apostles, may always be ordered and guided by faithful and true pastors; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever, Amen