

Youth in Search of Meaning and Identity

John 1: 43-51

All the different cultures in this world consider youth as a period in human life that needs much deliberation. It is a time of freedom when the body has the capacity to reach anywhere the mind wishes. The pleasures and the failures that results from this is a peculiarity of this age. A time when everything is questioned using reason and logic. A time when we quarrel over all unanswered questions. A time when creative decisions are taken. In short, a time in which we stand at a crossroad and decide on the path to be chosen for further travel.

The world encountered Christ after a long gap during such a time in His life. It was his youth. His voice was more intense than any voice that was being heard for centuries. It had clarity. It contained answers to many questions. Many emerged from darkness, flying like moths towards the radiance that emanated from Him. In that radiance, they saw God. They listened to Him, understood Him.

Christ, after receiving baptism from John, is returning to Galilee. There he met those who are to accompany Him thereafter.

1. Those who saw Christ (V 43)

Jesus saw Philipose. Philipose saw Nathanael. V 45. Nathanael saw Christ. V 47. A cycle of sights have come full circle. Within this, certain questions are being raised. Answers are also produced. Philipose make an analysis from within the limits of his knowledge about the Christ whom He met. V 45.

What do I have in me to understand Christ? Pre-knowledge about something certainly help us understand the object better. We understand this idea more clearly from the story of the Samaritan woman mentioned in John 4. For her, Christ was a Jew, an enemy of Samaritans. Later on, Christ transforms into a prophet and the Messiah for her.

A critical question raised by Nathanael is also of some help in understanding Jesus better. V 46. "Can anything good come from Nazareth?" Maybe this question comes up from the specific socio-cultural background of that era. There existed feuds and disagreements between villages and between towns during that time, arising mostly from envy. That might be the reason why Nathanael, from Cana in Galilee, didn't have any good opinion about Nazareth in Galilee. Even his prejudices had no place when it came to his eagerness to listen to Christ. This is a quality essential even for today's world.

When we become prisoners to our own prejudices, we lose an opportunity to be the followers of the one who is to transform this world. When we wander in this world searching for our identity, raising questions like "Who am I, God?" and "Why

did You send me to this world?”, we should be ready to listen to the one who has “seen us” already.

2. Those who listened to Christ. V 47.

“Here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.” He who was seeing Christ for the first time listens to a voice that is beyond his comprehension. One who found nothing good in Nazareth worth mentioning received from a Nazarene some good words on the virtue of his own character, which no one else had bothered to acknowledge till then.

Everyone from little kids to aged grandparents are today members of WhatsApp groups. People whom we have never seen, people who are not known to us personally, those who are not directly linked to us – we chat to all these people enthusiastically, on matters that do not concern us at all. When we try to firmly affirm by repeated utterances facts that are far from the truth, we should realize that the Nazarene who acknowledged the good in another and gave up His life for him is far beyond our grasp.

Nathanael’s queries are not over yet. “How do you know me?” Someone who needs glasses to read even his own name written on a book placed before him asked this question to the Creator of the universe. Many a times, our questions also are only this deep. Questions raised without knowing who the other one is. Even then, Christ gives him answers. His kind answers to our stubborn bickering like that of a child sitting in its mother’s lap and pulling her hair.

He saw Nathanael like when He saw Zacchaeus. A transformation happens in both instances. When they were ready to listen to the one who had seen them first, they found God in Him. Are we, who live in this world of fantastic sights, ready to listen to Him? Listening demands silence. Circumstances should be created for Christ to speak. Let us sit silently for a while before the Word. He has something to tell us.

3. Those who knew Christ. V 49, 50.

“Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.” He is pronouncing three adjectives in one utterance. You are Rabbi – teacher. You spread light. Having thrown light over my knowledge about you, which was earlier filled with darkness, and having made me recognize the goodness within myself, you have helped me discern the virtue in others. You are my teacher.

What had been written in the Law by Moses and other prophets has now become my experience for the first time. The one who was ready to take me along with him even after I mocked him saying if any good will ever come from Nazareth (he who knew that I sat beneath the fig tree must have surely known what I did say) – who is he, but Christ himself!

You are the king of Israel. What this nation needs now is your kingdom. A king who loves his subjects together with their faults.

Here, the Lord gives him a huge promise: “You will see greater things than this.” Even while Nathanael is witnessing Christ from the utmost expansion of a man’s intellect, Christ tells him, “I am beyond this.” In a world that relies on human intellect for anything and everything, if incessant rains that poured down for four days could reduce God’s own country into the corridors of a few schools and halls, we should return to normalcy not by constructing houses that are larger than before, nor by building bridges and roads that are greater than the earlier ones. We should return to our land as people who can see the goodness in others, like Jaisal who showed his back for the others to step on. In our search for the meaning of youth, let this flood also be a lesson.