

AUGUST XXIV.

ST. BARTHOLOMEW, APOSTLE.

THE name here given to this apostle is not his proper, but patronymical name: and imports, the son of Tholomew or Tolmai, like Barjona and Bartimeus. Rupertus, Jansenius, and several other learned interpreters of the holy scripture, take this apostle to have been the same person with Nathaniel, a native of Cana, in Galilee, a doctor in the Jewish law, and one of the seventy-two disciples of Christ, to whom he was conducted by St. Philip, and whose innocence and simplicity of heart deserved to be celebrated with the highest eulogium by the divine mouth of our Redeemer. (1) Bartholomew Gavant, the learned commentator on the Rubrics of the Roman Missal and Breviary, has endeavoured, by an express dissertation, to prove this conjecture. F. Stilling, the Bollandist, has undertaken to confirm this opinion more at large; (2) for whereas St. John never mentions Bartholomew among the apostles, so the other three evangelists take no notice of the name of Nathaniel; and they constantly put together Philip and Bartholomew, as St. John says Philip and Nathaniel came together to Christ. Also Nathaniel is reckoned with other apostles when Christ appeared to them at the sea of Galilee after his resurrection; (3) and if he had not already belonged to that sacred college, why was he not propounded a candidate for the apostleship to fill the vacant place of Judas?

St. Bartholomew was chosen by Christ one of his twelve apostles, when he formed that sacred college. (4) He was with them witness of our Lord's glorious resurrection, and his other principal actions on earth, and was instructed in his divine school, and from his sacred mouth. He is mentioned among the other disciples who were met together joining in devout prayer after Christ's ascension, and he received the Holy Ghost with the rest. Having been prepared by the example and instructions of our Redeemer, and by humble and fervent prayer, he was replenished, in the descent of the Holy Ghost, with an

(1) John i. 41.

(2) Augusti, t. 4, p. 7.

(3) John xxi. 2.

(4) Matt. x. 3.

heroic spirit of humility, mortification, contempt of the world, compunction, prayer, holy zeal, and burning charity. Thus armed and filled with the eminent spirit of all virtues, twelve apostles converted many great nations to Christ, and carried the sound of his name into the remotest corners of the earth. How comes it that now-a-days the apostolical labours of so many ministers of the divine word produce so little fruit? One great reason of this difference is, their neglect to obtain of God a large share in the spirit of the apostles. Their success and the influence of their words upon the hearts of men depend not upon human prudence, eloquence, and abilities; the principal instrument of God's grace in multiplying the fruit of his word in the hearts of men, is the spirit with which it is announced by those whom he honours with the ministry. Their sincere disinterestedness, humility, and overflowing zeal and charity give, as it were, a living voice to that divine faith and virtue which they preach; and those who take upon them this charge are doubly bound to prepare themselves for it by strenuously labouring to obtain of Christ this perfect spirit in the sanctification of their own souls, not to profane their holy ministry, and destroy the work of God which is committed to their charge.

St. Bartholomew being eminently qualified by the divine grace to discharge the functions of an apostle, carried the gospel through the most barbarous countries of the East, penetrating into the remoter Indies, as Eusebius(1) and other ancient writers testify. By the name of Indies, the ancients sometimes mean only Arabia and Persia; but here they speak of proper India; for they make mention of the Brachmans of that country, famous over the whole world for their pretended skill in philosophy, and in the superstitious mysteries of their idolatry. Eusebius relates that St. Pantæus, about the beginning of the third century, going into the Indies to confute their Brachmans, found there some who still retained the knowledge of Christ, and showed him a copy of St. Matthew's gospel in Hebrew, which they assured him that St. Bartholomew had brought into those parts when he planted the faith among them. This apostle returned again into the north-west parts of Asia, and met St. Philip at Hierapolis, in Phrygia. Hence he travelled

(1) L. 5, c. 10.

into Lycaonia, where St. Chrysostom affirms that he instructed the people in the Christian faith; but we know not even the names of many of the countries to which he preached. We are struck with astonishment when we call to mind how many prisons the apostles sanctified, how many dangers they braved, how many vast regions they travelled over, and how many nations they conquered to Christ; but if we admire their courage, zeal, and labours, we have still greater reason to wonder and be confounded at our supine sloth and insensibility, who do nothing for the enlargement of God's kingdom in others, or even for the sanctification of our own souls. It is not owing to the want of means or of strength through the divine grace, but to the want of courage and sincere resolution that we do so little; that we find no opportunities for exercising charity towards our neighbour, no time for prayer and recollection of spirit, no strength for the practice of fasting and penance. If we examine into the truth, we shall find that we blind ourselves by vain pretences, and that sloth, tepidity, and indifferency have many hinderances, which fervour, resolution, industry, and contrivance find ways readily to remove. The apostles who did and suffered so much for God, still sincerely called themselves unprofitable servants, made no account of their labours, and were altogether taken up with the thoughts of what they owed to God, and how infinitely they yet fell short of this. True love exerts itself beyond what seems possible, yet counts all it does as nothing.

St. Bartholomew's last removal was into Great Armenia, where, preaching in a place obstinately addicted to the worship of idols, he was crowned with a glorious martyrdom, as St. Gregory of Tours mentions.⁽¹⁾ The modern Greek historians say, that he was condemned by the governor of Albanopolis to be crucified. Others affirm, that he was flayed alive, which might well enough consist with his crucifixion; this double punishment being in use, as we learn from Plutarch and Arrian, not only in Egypt, but also among the Persians, the next neighbours to these Armenians, who might very easily borrow from them this piece of barbarous cruelty. Theodorus Lector says, that the Emperor Anastasius having built the city of

(1) L. I, c. 34.

Duras, in Mesopotamia, in 508, caused the relics of St. Bartholomew to be removed thither. St. Gregory of Tours assures us that, before the end of the sixth age they were carried to the isle of Lipari, near Sicily. Anastasius, the Librarian, informs us (1) that, in 809 they were translated from Lipari to Benevento; from whence they were conveyed to Rome in 983, as Baronius relates. Ever since that time they lie deposited in a porphyry monument under the high altar, in the famous church of St. Bartholomew, in the isle of the Tiber, in Rome. An arm of this apostle's body was sent a present by the bishop of Benevento to St. Edward the Confessor, and by him bestowed on the cathedral church of Canterbury. Among the many excellent statues which adorn the cathedral at Milan, none is more justly admired than one of St. Bartholomew flayed alive, representing the muscles, veins, and other parts, with an inimitable softness and justness, the work of Chr. Cibo. The feast of St. Bartholomew in ancient Martyrologies is marked on the 24th of August in the West, but among the Greeks on the 11th of June.

The characteristical virtue of the apostles was zeal for the divine glory; the first property of the love of God. A soldier is always ready to defend the honour of his prince, and a son that of his father; and can a Christian say he loves God, who is indifferent to his honour? Or can charity towards his neighbour be lodged in his breast, if he can see him in danger of perishing, and not endeavour, at least by tears and prayers, to avert his misfortune? Every faithful servant of God makes the first petition which our Lord teaches us in his divine prayer, the object of his perpetual ardent desires and tears, that the God of his heart, and of all creatures, may be known, perfectly loved, and faithfully served by all; and he never ceases earnestly to invite, with the royal prophet, all creatures with their whole strength, and with all their powers, to magnify the Lord with him; but then it is the first part of his care and prayer that he may himself perfectly attain to this happiness of devoting to God all the affections of his soul, and all the actions of his life; and it is to him a subject of perpetual tears and compunction that he should have ever offended so good a God, and so kind a Redeemer.

(1) Auctar. Bibl. Patr.