

FIRST READING: Acts of the Apostles 8:26-40

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles:

The angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, "Get up and head south on the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza, the desert route." So he got up and set out. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, that is, the queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury, who had come to Jerusalem to worship, and was returning home. Seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. The Spirit said to Philip, "Go and join up with that chariot." Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He replied, "How can I, unless someone instructs me?" So he invited Philip to get in and sit with him. This was the Scripture passage he was reading: *Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter, and as a lamb before its shearer is silent, so he opened not his mouth. In his humiliation justice was denied him. Who will tell of his posterity? For his life is taken from the earth.* Then the eunuch said to Philip in reply, "I beg you, about whom is the prophet saying this? About himself, or about someone else?" Then Philip opened his mouth and, beginning with this Scripture passage, he proclaimed Jesus to him. As they traveled along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "Look, there is water. What is to prevent my being baptized?" Then he ordered the chariot to stop, and Philip and the eunuch both went down into the water, and he baptized him. When they came out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away, and the eunuch saw him no more, but continued on his way rejoicing. Philip came to Azotus, and went about proclaiming the good news to all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 66:8-9, 16-17, 20.

Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.

Bless our God, you peoples, loudly sound his praise; He has given life to our souls, and has not let our feet slip.

Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.

Hear now, all you who fear God, while I declare what he has done for me. When I appealed to him in words, praise was on the tip of my tongue.

Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.

Blessed be God who refused me not my prayer or his kindness!

Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.

GOSPEL: John 6:44-51

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to John:

Jesus said to the crowds: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him, and I will raise him on the last day. It is written in the prophets: *They shall all be taught by God.* Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me. Not that anyone has seen

the Father except the one who is from God; he has seen the Father. Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the desert, but they died; this is the bread that comes down from heaven so that one may eat it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven; whoever eats this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give is my Flesh for the life of the world.”
The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for the 3rd Thursday of Easter II

I remember when I was in grammar school; the miraculous aspect of this reading from Acts grabbed me. I was fascinated by Philip’s means of transport. He moved through space and time in an instant. This would later become one of the themes in Star Trek. Yet, even the event of how Philip found and preached to the Ethiopian, pales in comparison of the true miracle that happened in the story. We have witnessed the moment this man came to faith. The Spirit rushed upon him and changed his life forever. Philip may have appeared and disappeared, but the Ethiopian persisted in faith.

While I have worked for years as a priest, I have baptized many people, formed many who sought to join the Catholic Church, have guided people in their spiritual journeys and witnessed many who profess our faith, I have never witnessed a moment as did Philip. I can’t even point to the moment when I came to faith. Having been baptized as a baby, like most of us, I grew up having it. I’ve been a believer in Jesus and a Catholic all my life. I have experienced times when my faith has deepened and been present with others when their faith deepened too. Sometimes the pieces arranged in the normal chaos of life can fall into place by the same grace and Spirit of God. They are events that are just as powerful and miraculous as the moment faith arrived in the life of the eunuch. Most of us can remember some times when we felt the grace of God with just a little reflection.

What is the faith here? As Catholics we have a lot of doctrines and dogma. The Catechism of the Catholic Church has much information contained on its pages. It’s almost as thick as the bible. All of what we believe as Catholics comes to one, basic statement. “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that everyone who has faith in him may not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16 the Revised English Bible) Faith in God and in Jesus is the basis for all Christian faith and leads to our salvation through the forgiveness of sins.

Neither Philip’s eloquence nor the effectiveness of any of his preaching had anything to do with the man’s conversion. It was the grace of God that led to the convergence of the Ethiopian and Phillip. God graced the seeker with faith. As John wrote, in today’s gospel, He came to Jesus because God drew him to the moment and made it happen. His desire to seek clarity in Isaiah’s passage was also God’s gift of grace. I receive the same grace as I pray, reflect, and type. You receive it as you read, pray and reflect. Our faith has deepened in the process and as a result of God’s powerful gift. Are we in the process of being taught by God?

Having believed our entire lives, we give witness to our faith in what we say and do. We also give living witness to our salvation in Christ through our faith. What did manna in the desert do? It fed and sustained the Israelite people on their journey to the Promised Land. Jesus died on the cross to forgive our sins; once and for all. His resurrection gave us the promise of eternal

life with God. We journey through life in faith as our witness. We journey to God and God's Kingdom when Jesus returns. What sustains our journey? It is Jesus, who is not just our savior but is also the Bread of Life. Knowing Jesus presence is also part of the same grace of God. Jesus is a mere thought away. We know Jesus' presence as we gather to share in the Eucharist. All of this is by the Grace of God and the magnificent outpouring of love by the Holy Spirit.

In Acts we have witnessed the moment of grace when the Ethiopian came to faith. The Spirit of God drew Philip to him. The same Spirit led him rejoicing as his life of faith continued. As powerful as this is, more significantly to us is how this same Spirit draws us closer to God on our life's journey. All it takes is a moment to remember that Jesus is there and with us. Today's gospel of John brings Jesus words directly to us and for our sustenance, God's Word to our hearts. As we gather to know him as we break the Bread of Life, we bring Jesus into the waiting world when we leave mass.

May we know God's sustaining and amazing grace with Jesus' name.

James D. Beath
May 5, 2022