

4. April 2024

The necessity of instruction

We will listen the reading for this day again according to the traditional calendar:
Acts 8:26-40

But an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." This is a desert road. And he rose and went. And behold, an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a minister of the Can'dace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of all her treasure, had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, "Go up and join this chariot." So Philip ran to him, and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless some one guides me?" And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. Now the passage of the scripture which he was reading was this:

*"As a sheep led to the slaughter
or a lamb before its shearer is dumb,
so he opens not his mouth.
In his humiliation justice was denied him.
Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken up from the earth."*

And the eunuch said to Philip, "About whom, pray, does the prophet say this, about himself or about some one else?" Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this scripture he told him the good news of Jesus. And as they went along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, "See, here is water! What is to prevent my being baptized?"[b] And he commanded the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him. And when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught up Philip; and the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip was found at Azo'tus, and passing on he preached the gospel to all the towns till he came to Caesare'a.

People who are searching for God need to be instructed to come to faith. Today's reading shows this clearly:

"Philip ran to him, and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" And he said, "How can I, unless someone guides me?"

This need for instruction applies not only to those who are searching for God, but also to all those who want to live their faith in a true way. The truths of our faith, simple as they are, need to be deepened and nourished daily. It is necessary, therefore, to assimilate the Word of God, which does not return to Him empty (Isa 55:11), but strengthens man in the truth.

Certainly, we have often heard the same readings and passages from the Gospel. In fact, they are regularly repeated. But we can draw greater fruit from them if they are explained to us more and more deeply, so that they penetrate deeply and take root as reality in us. And how much more necessary is this explanation for those who do not yet know and understand the Word of God sufficiently!

Let us look at the minister of the Queen of Ethiopia. He had come to Jerusalem to worship God and had already read the Scriptures. But he could not understand who was the lamb that was to be slaughtered, as described by the prophet Isaiah. On the basis of this passage, Philip was able to share the Gospel with him, and the man believed with all his heart and asked to be baptised.

Certainly not everyone is as well prepared to receive the Gospel as the eunuch in today's reading. But spiritual vigilance and attentive listening to the Holy Spirit will greatly help us to discern those aspects of a person's search which we can use as a "hook" to bear witness to the Gospel. In this sense, St Paul is a great model for us in the scene where, in the midst of the Athenian pantheon with its various idols, he identifies an altar "to the unknown God". He then uses this circumstance to tell the Athenians whom they were worshipping without knowing it (cf. Acts 17:16-34).

Certainly, this requires apostolic zeal and the conviction that each person needs to know the infinite love of God, which motivates us to proclaim the Gospel in which this love is revealed to us. If we only see the Gospel as one of many equally valid options and

religions, the Holy Spirit will not be able to lead us into those situations where it would be possible to pass on the message of life, as Philip did.

But if we are filled with apostolic zeal, the Angel of the Lord will lead us to cooperate in the great work of our Heavenly Father to bring people home. This applies to whatever situation we find ourselves in, especially in today's world. We must look with the eyes of God and be ever attentive to the promptings of the Spirit, so that the Lord can count on us and offer His light to men through us. This must be done in complete inner freedom and not give way to unhealthy pressures. Like the great Apostle to the Gentiles, we can consider evangelisation as a "*duty incumbent upon us*" (1 Cor 9:16). Is there anything more important for people than to know the love of God revealed in our risen Saviour? Surely not!