



## Thursday of the 3rd Week of Easter



**Date:** Thursday, April 27, 2023 | **Season:** Easter | **Year:** A

**First Reading:** Acts 8:26–40

**Responsorial Psalm:** Psalm 66:8–9, 16–17, 20 | **Response:** Psalm 66:1

**Gospel Acclamation:** John 6:51

**Gospel Reading:** John 6:44–51

**Preached at:** the Chapel of the Most Holy Name, Kolvenbach House in the Archdiocese of Lusaka, Zambia.

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**T**his afternoon In John's Gospel, disciples are the Father's gift to Jesus. That is the sense of Jesus' words in today's Gospel: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draw him" (Jn 6:44). The Ethiopian eunuch in Acts is a good example of one whom the Father draws to Jesus through the study of the Sacred Scriptures.

That the Eunuch is returning from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem is important and reminds us of other encounters on the road away from Jerusalem. Let us remember that the law at the time excluded eunuchs from membership in the community of the Lord (I'm sure you'll recall the law as laid down in Deuteronomy 23:2 which said "No one whose testicles are crushed or whose penis is cut off shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord." But Isaiah had prophesied that someday that would change. I'm sure you know people who could quote Deuteronomy but I bet there are less of you who would remember this part of Isaiah, 56:3–5:

"Do not let the foreigner joined to the Lord say, "The Lord will surely separate me from his people"; and do not let the eunuch say, "I am just a dry tree." For thus says the Lord: To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off."

We're told Philip was reading Isaiah, perhaps he was reading that section, because Philip welcomed the Eunuch.

Of course the Eunuch did ask: “What is to prevent me from being baptized?” He was concerned about keeping the covenant and sabbath etc. But Philip gave no answer.

I sometimes think the Church has spent centuries trying to invent answers for that question – to find ways of excluding instead of including! But Phillip baptized him because he recognized that the Eunuch was drawn by the Father, just as Jesus said in the Gospel “No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me.”

Of course this story is similar to one we heard recently. Like Jesus on the road to Emmaus, Philip meets the eunuch on the road leaving Jerusalem; he interrupted his reading of Isaiah, and converses with him in his carriage. Just as Jesus opened the Scriptures for the two men in the Emmaus story, Philip does so for the eunuch, who asks to be baptized. The eucharistic overtones in the Emmaus story—as well as in today’s Gospel—are complemented by the necessary preceding baptismal action in the first reading. As Jesus says in today’s Gospel: “Everyone who listens to my Father and learns from him comes to me” (Jn 6:45)—in both word and sacrament.

It’s good to remember that Isaiah’s prophecy came true that day – and is true in our time still. Let’s pray that we might respond to the Father’s call to us to be disciples, and to share Eucharist and Baptism with those who desire it. Let us pray that we might recognize that it is the Father who draws us into the Church.

In saying all of this I’m reminded of a great analogy of the Church where God is the cook in the kitchen, preparing a feast. And the Church’s ministers are like waiters serving in a restaurant for some very polite aristocratic guests who are ourselves. The waiters inevitably want to focus on which waiter is wearing the smartest clothes and tends the best tables and gets the most tips – and the people who attend sort of politely nod to the waiters, as aristocrats might, but they have come for the food. (Because no one goes to a restaurant because of the waiters! They go because the food is good.) And, as this analogy goes, we must trust that somehow the cook (God) is able to smuggle out the best food to us, no matter what games the waiters play, and how complicated they make the seating arrangements or dress-codes. Let’s pray that we might welcome whoever the Father invites to his Feast. And remember that Philip immediately baptized the Eunuch, enacting God’s promise of “giving, in his house and within his walls, a

monument and a name better than sons and daughters; God will give them an everlasting name that shall not be cut off.” May our pastoral action always be as prompt, lavish and welcoming. Lord hear us.

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