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Thursday of the 3rd Week of Easter

Date: Thursday, May 8, 2025 | **Season:** Easter | **Year:** C
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**.**

There is a moment, subtle yet seismic, in the life of every disciple—a moment when the words of Scripture move from being mere ink on a page to fire in the heart. For the Ethiopian eunuch, that moment came on a dusty road as he pondered the words of Isaiah, yearning for understanding. For those on the road to Emmaus, it came as the Stranger unfolded the Scriptures, setting their hearts ablaze. And for each of us, perhaps that moment has yet to come, or perhaps it is unfolding even now.

Philip, led by the Spirit, meets the eunuch in his searching. There is something profoundly Ignatian about this encounter. Philip does not impose, nor does he rush to instruct; rather, he begins where the eunuch is. “Do you understand what you are reading?” he asks—not as a scholar testing a student, but as one who knows that true wisdom comes not from possessing answers, but from asking the right questions. This is the method of Jesus Himself, who does not simply impart knowledge but awakens desire. He invites, He stirs, He draws.

And what is it that the eunuch is reading? A passage from Isaiah—the Suffering Servant, the One who was led like a lamb to the slaughter, whose life was poured out for many. The eunuch sees the words but cannot yet see the One to whom they point. And here Philip, in the manner of the best spiritual guides, helps him to see, to make the connection, to recognize that this Jesus, crucified and risen, is the fulfillment of his longing.

But this encounter is even richer when we consider what else Isaiah says. The very book the eunuch holds contains not only the prophecy of the Suffering Servant but also a stunning promise to people like him—those once excluded by law and custom. In Isaiah 56, the Lord says: “Let not the foreigner who has

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joined himself to the Lord say, 'The Lord will surely separate me from his people'; and let not the eunuch say, 'Behold, I am a dry tree.'" And then, with breathtaking mercy, God declares: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths and choose the things that please me… I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters" (Is. 56:3–5).

Surely the eunuch must have known this passage too. He had likely carried it in his heart for years—a whispered hope. And now, in Jesus, Philip shows him that the promise is not only poetic, but real. In Christ, the ancient barriers fall away. The gates of the Kingdom stand open. The invitation is universal.

And then, in a moment of boldness, the eunuch sees water and asks, "What is to prevent me from being baptized?"

What indeed? What prevents us from drawing near to the living God? What prevents us from recognizing the presence of Christ on our own road? Is it doubt? Fear? A sense of unworthiness? The eunuch knew what it was to be excluded—his very identity rendered him an outsider in the eyes of the Law. Yet in Christ, the ancient barriers fall away. The prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled: "To the eunuchs who hold fast to my covenant, I will give them an everlasting name" (Isaiah 56:4-5). The gates of the Kingdom stand open. The invitation is universal.

The Gospel today takes us deeper into that invitation. Jesus speaks with absolute clarity: "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." Here is a mystery—our journey to Christ is not a solitary endeavor, but a response to a divine summons. We are drawn, wooed, pursued by a Love that will not let us go. The Eucharist itself is the greatest expression of this drawing: the Bread of Life offered freely, the Manna from Heaven that sustains us on the way. The table of the Lord is not a reward for the perfect, but nourishment for pilgrims. It is not a prize for the worthy, but medicine for the sick. It is here, in this breaking of bread, that we find our true home.

And yet, the world is full of those still searching, still reading without understanding, still longing for a guide. Here in Zambia, how many cry out in hunger—physical hunger, yes, but also the hunger for justice, for dignity, for a future that is not dictated by the sins of the past? How many young people seek mean-

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ing in a society that offers them few paths forward? How many, like the eunuch, find themselves at the margins, wondering if the promise of Christ is truly for them?

The Gospel calls us to be like Philip—to go where the Spirit sends us, to walk alongside those in search of truth, to listen before we speak, and to guide not with arrogance but with humility. It calls us to recognize that faith is never a possession to be hoarded but a gift to be shared. And it challenges us to ask: who in my life is waiting for an invitation to the waters of grace? Who is waiting for someone to ask, “Do you understand what you are reading?”

As we stand in this Easter season, the season of new life and unbreakable hope, let us not be content to keep this joy for ourselves. Let us be drawn ever more deeply into the mystery of Christ, and let us, in turn, be agents of His drawing—so that all may come to know the Bread of Life, the one who satisfies every hunger, the one who has conquered death, the one who calls each of us by name.

As we prepare to receive the Eucharist, I leave you with these questions for your prayer this week:

- Where in my life is God drawing me closer to Him, and how am I responding?
- Who around me is searching for meaning, and how might I walk with them in their journey of faith?
- What prevents me from fully embracing the grace and invitation of Christ, and what steps can I take to surrender more fully to His love?

Prayer for the Cardinals in Conclave

God of wisdom and grace,
you never cease to call your Church forward.

As the College of Cardinals gathers to discern and elect a new pope,
grant them inner freedom—free from fear, ambition, and division—
that they may be truly available to your Spirit.

Give them listening hearts,
attentive to the cries of the world and the needs of your Church.
Help them to listen to your Holy Spirit, whom you send to guide them,

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that they may recognize your desire and faithfully follow your will.

Unite us all in prayer,
that this moment may be one of deep communion,
true discernment, and renewed hope for your Church.

With Mary, Mother of the Church, we entrust this time to you,
through Christ our Lord.
Amen.

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In preparing this homily, I consulted various resources to deepen my understanding of today's readings, including using Magisterium AI for assistance. The final content remains the responsibility of the author.