

Notes for Next Sunday

Fifth Sunday of Easter

The Point of this Week's Readings

First Reading (Acts 8:26-40). God leads Philip to bear witness to and baptize an important official from Ethiopia, ensuring that Jews in Africa and also Ethiopians would likewise receive the Gospel. The Holy Spirit brings the eunuch to faith through the Word and Baptism. Today, rejoice in the Word and Baptism you have received, through which the Holy Spirit continues to work in your life.

Epistle (1 John 4:1-11). Whenever a teacher speaks of a “Christ” or a “Jesus” or a “God” who comes to us without human flesh, know this: it is a demon speaking through a man, a demon who is seeking to destroy both your faith and your soul everlastingly. “Whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works” (2Jn 11). Faith in the heart cannot be seen; it can only be shown through acts of love. The greatest testimony is the true flesh-and-blood testimony of God’s love manifest in Jesus. As long as we remain in fellowship with the Father through faith, we love one another and have no fear of Judgment Day. Whenever we do not treat our brother with love as Jesus has loved us, we fear God’s punishment. Because He sent His Son to take away our sins, we gain confidence to stand before God without fear.

Gospel (John 15:1-8). Christ is the true vine, and His disciples are the branches, vitally connected to Him and spontaneously bearing fruit under His purifying care. Christians must love one another as friends, not regard one another as enemies. By grace, God has dwelt among us in His Son (1:14) and has joined us together in a fellowship of self-giving love.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below

FIRST READING – Acts 8:26-40

²⁶ Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Go south to the road—the desert road—that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” ²⁷ So he started out, and on his way he met an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of all the treasury of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians. This man had gone to Jerusalem to worship, ²⁸ and on his way home was sitting in his chariot reading the book of Isaiah the prophet. ²⁹ The Spirit told Philip, “Go to that chariot and stay near it.” ³⁰ Then Philip ran up to the chariot and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. “Do you understand what you are reading?” Philip asked. ³¹ “How can I,” he said, “unless someone explains it to me?” So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him. ³² The eunuch was reading this passage of Scripture: “He was led like a sheep to the slaughter, and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. ³³ In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.” ³⁴ The eunuch asked Philip, “Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?” ³⁵ Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus. ³⁶ As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?” ³⁸ And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. ³⁹ When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. ⁴⁰ Philip, however, appeared at Azotus and traveled about, preaching the gospel in all the towns until he reached Caesarea.

8:27 an Ethiopian. OT “Cushite,” known to Israelites through contacts with Egypt and Sheba. Judeans fled into Egypt during the Babylonian exile and settled on the island of Elephantine in Upper Egypt (near modern Aswan). They likely spread the faith southward into Nubia (Sudan) and Ethiopia. The Falasha religion of Ethiopia likely had ancient Jewish roots. (TLSB)

8:27 *Eunuch*. It was not uncommon for castrated males to hold positions of importance in oriental courts. It seems certain that Luke intends us to see this man as sexually mutilated. Such a condition precluded full participation in the assembly. The eunuch may be marginal within the Pharisaic definition of the people of God, but he is a mighty person in his own land (over all the queen's treasury!). His chariot is capacious enough for himself and the scrolls and a guest. He speaks elegant Greek. He has a driver. Whoever the "historical Ethiopian" might have been, therefore, Luke clearly wants his readers to see him as a part of the "ingathering of the scattered people" of Israel. (Sacra)

8:28 *reading ... Isaiah*. A man of considerable means (affording a large scroll) and education. (TLSB)

8:30 *heard the man reading*. It was customary practice to read aloud. (CSB)

8:39 *the eunuch did not see him again*. The eunuch was no longer excluded from full-fellowship with the people of God. Another non-Jew was added to the company of believers. We do not know from Scripture or from history whether other believers were gathered by his testimony to the Savior after he returned home. (PBC)

8:38 *Caesarea*. Rebuilt by Herod and with an excellent harbor, it served as the headquarters of the Roman procurators. The account leaves Philip in Caesarea at this time; his next appearance is 20 years later, and he is still located in the same place (21:8). (CSB)

EPISTLE – 1 John 4:1-11

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, ³but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world. ⁴You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world. ⁵They are from the world and therefore speak from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to them. ⁶We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us. This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood. ⁷Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. ¹⁰This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. ¹¹Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

4:1 *spirit*. "Spirit" here is not the Spirit of God, but the spirit of man, and even the spirit of errorists, teachers who pervert the Word of God. (Stoeckhardt)

4:1 *test the spirits*. This means an examination of words and actions in light of the whole testimony of Scriptures. Luther: "The emphasis is on the words 'test the spirits,' for with these words he touches their boasting as with a needle. If it is as if he were saying 'Those who boast of the Spirit will come to you. But test the spirits.'" (TLSB)

4:3 *spirit of antichrist*. Satan would draw us away from our true Savior, who suffered, bled, and died and still has scars to prove it. All false christs have this in common: none of them come as God in the flesh of Jesus Christ (cf. 2 John 7-11).

4:6 Spirit of truth. The true teacher is moved by the spirit of truth, who is permeated by divine truth and so confesses and proclaims the truth which God reveals. (Stoeckhardt)

4:7 love comes from God. What the world considers love is actually selfish and self-centered, but all true love is from God. Love of sinful pleasures is misplaced affection, which corrupts what is good. E.g., it is natural to want to have a spouse and a family. But to steal someone else's spouse or family would be a perversion of a God-given desire. (TLSB)

GOSPEL – John 15:1-8

“I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes^a so that it will be even more fruitful. ³ You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. ⁵ “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. ⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. ⁸ This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

15:1 the true vine. The vine is frequently used in the OT as a symbol of Israel. When this imagery is used, Israel is often shown as lacking in some way. Jesus, however, is “the true vine.” (CSB)

15:2 prunes. Pruning produces fruitfulness. In the NT the figure of good fruit represents the product of a godly life (see Mt 3:8; 7:16–20) or virtues of character. (CSB)

15:4 Remain in me. The believer has no fruitfulness apart from his union and fellowship with Christ. A branch out of contact with the vine is lifeless. (CSB)

15:5 bear much fruit. This is a general assurance. But in the next sentence Jesus individualizes: “The one who remains in Me and thus I in him.” This is a personal assurance and open invitation to every repentant sinner. “If a man” is a demonstrative pronoun pointing back to the individual repentant sinner who believes in Christ. (Buls)

15:6 thrown into the fire and burned. Judged. In light of such passages as 6:39; 10:27–28, these branches probably do not represent true believers. Genuine salvation is evidenced by a life of fruitfulness (“things that accompany salvation”). (CSB)

15:7 my words remain in you. It is impossible to pray correctly apart from knowing and believing the teachings of Christ. (CSB)

15:7 ask whatever you wish. Implicit in our asking is acknowledgment that Jesus is our Savior. Ridiculous or godless requests—which faith, relying on his words, would not make anyway—are not included in the promise. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 4, Part 2)