

30. April 2020

## “Help for the evangelisation”

*Acts 8,26-40*

*The angel of the Lord spoke to Philip saying, 'Set out at noon and go along the road that leads from Jerusalem down to Gaza, the desert road.' So he set off on his journey. Now an Ethiopian had been on pilgrimage to Jerusalem; he was a eunuch and an officer at the court of the kandake, or queen, of Ethiopia; he was her chief treasurer. He was now on his way home; and as he sat in his chariot he was reading the prophet Isaiah. The Spirit said to Philip, 'Go up and join that chariot.' When Philip ran up, he heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, 'Do you understand what you are reading?' He replied, 'How could I, unless I have someone to guide me?' So he urged Philip to get in and sit by his side. Now the passage of scripture he was reading was this: Like a lamb led to the slaughter-house, like a sheep dumb in front of its shearers, he never opens his mouth. In his humiliation fair judgement was denied him. Who will ever talk about his descendants, since his life on earth has been cut short? The eunuch addressed Philip and said, 'Tell me, is the prophet referring to himself or someone else?' Starting, therefore, with this text of scripture Philip proceeded to explain the good news of Jesus to him. Further along the road they came to some water, and the eunuch said, 'Look, is there some water; is there anything to prevent my being baptised?' He ordered the chariot to stop, then Philip and the eunuch both went down into the water and he baptised him. But after they had come up out of the water again Philip was taken away by the Spirit of the Lord, and the eunuch never saw him again but went on his way rejoicing. Philip appeared in Azotus and continued his journey, proclaiming the good news in every town as far as Caesarea.*

What about guidance from God?

Today we might find it difficult to imagine being instructed directly by an angel, or that the Spirit of the Lord speaks directly to us. We prefer to refer to our reason or to the general rules of following Christ. Priests can become very unsettled and perhaps even angry if you come to them and say: "God has told me this and that, the saints have guided me, my angel has advised me, Our Lady has instructed me!"

Such defensive reactions of priests may be understandable if one is frequently confronted with such situations, if the persons in question may even become obtrusive with their messages or believe that they know everything better. But the rejection must not go so far as to refuse in general every self-communication of God through a word or in other ways. A fundamental rejection of this area seems not sober from a spiritual point of view as also an overestimation and overoccupation with it.

In today's text it is specifically mentioned that Philip gets the decisive hint to choose a certain road from an angel. It is not said whether he appeared to him or whether he only heard him. It is just as naturally mentioned that the Spirit told Philip to follow the chariot of the chamberlain from Ethiopia and later it is said that the Spirit of the Lord took Philip away.

There are more examples in which the apostles were led by the Holy Spirit, listened to him or angels were quite naturally involved in God's plan of salvation and were identified as such.

Obviously there was a great familiarity and naturalness between the apostles and the heavenly church. Whether they perceived the voices of the Spirit from within or heard them from without is not so decisive. They were able to understand the inspirations, or however God communicated himself to them. We also know this through church history, that God gives such help to his disciples.

In today's case we see clearly what the guidance of God is aimed at. It is evangelization. And here it is good to remember that the Holy Spirit is the first evangelist. He is the one who moves and leads Philip. Specifically, in this text he sends him to the treasurer of the Ethiopian Queen. This man was prepared by the same Spirit, because he came to Jerusalem to worship God and read the prophet Isaiah. Precisely this reading served as a hook, since the official did not understand it and Philip used his doubts to announce the Good News of Jesus to him. So everything was prepared, the chamberlain came to faith and as a consequence this step was sealed with baptism. The baptized person then moved on with joy, while Philip was "taken away" by the Spirit, to preach the gospel in another region!

This extraordinary chain of events invites us to reflect!

Can we still count on such guidance from the Holy Spirit today? Do angels or saints still stand by us today to support us in the service of evangelization? Or was this a special grace of the Church of the beginning?

Certainly the great first evangelization of the Apostles, and especially of Saint Paul, was an extraordinary grace. But this work is not yet over, even if there are changed situations in the world today. Evangelization continues until the end of time. Even if we have become tired and perhaps have been working in the Lord's vineyard for a long time and success seems to be low: never will the Holy Spirit and the heavenly Church become tired. We can always rely on them, because their desire is great that the world should know the Messiah!

We too can and should pay attention to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In this way, and also to us, the heavenly Church can communicate in various ways, especially when there are certain limits to the visible militant Church.

Certainly, for this is needed the spirit of discernment, so that we do not consider our own ideas or even Satan's whispers to be heavenly voices; and we do wisely to be self-critical. But such an attitude must not lead us to stop being moved by the Spirit of the Lord and to avoid the risk of proclaiming our faith, because misconceptions and misunderstandings can arrive. Today's text should encourage us to serve evangelization in the right way, knowing that this is God's intention.

Wisdom will then guide us in the Lord to know when is the right time to pass on the truth of the Gospel and also to discern whether the other person is prepared by God.

What is certain is that God “*wants everyone to be saved and reach full knowledge of the truth.*” (1Tim 2,4). The Holy Spirit does not tire; may he strengthen us so that we too may not tire of working in the service of God, gladly accepting the help of the angels as God gives it to us.