

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

LECTIONARY #55

READING I Acts of the Apostles 8:5–8, 14–17

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

Philip went down to the city of Samaria and proclaimed the Christ to them.

With one accord, the crowds paid attention to what was said by Philip

when they heard it and saw the signs he was doing.

For unclean spirits, crying out in a loud voice,

came out of many possessed people,

and many paralyzed or crippled people were cured.

There was great joy in that city.

Now when the apostles in Jerusalem

heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God,

they sent them Peter and John,

who went down and prayed for them,

that they might receive the Holy Spirit,

for it had not yet fallen upon any of them;

they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

Then they laid hands on them

and they received the Holy Spirit.

Samaria = suh-MAYR-ee-uh

This reading describes what it was like for the Holy Spirit to work through the early apostles of the Church, in this case, Philip, who is the focal figure of this reading.

Emphasis on "unclean spirits." Their negative energy is exorcised by Philip's work.

The conclusion of this reading emphasizes the work of the Holy Spirit. Emphasis here and at the end of the reading on "Holy Spirit."

READING I

In hearing of the success of Philip's preaching of the Gospel in the land of Samaria, we note a shift in the long-standing rift between the Samaritans and the Jews. We hear in Luke's Gospel of Jesus' healing of the ten lepers with one being a Samaritan (Luke 17:11–19) and the telling of the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37). These accounts, and the historical witness of the time, inform us about the discord between the Jews and the Samaritans. Yet here in the Acts of the Apostles we see Philip going to Samaria to preach to them about Christ.

Philip was one of the seven chosen to assist the twelve apostles in their ministry after the dispute broke out between the Hebrews and the Hellenists (Acts 6:1–7). Additionally, after the martyrdom of Stephen (who was one of the seven) and the persecution of the Church in Jerusalem, Philip and the other men were scattered but continued to preach the Good News (Acts 7:54–8:1; 8:1–4).

Arriving at the passage we hear in today's first reading, Philip goes to Samaria and God makes good use of these circumstances in which he finds himself. The

crowds were mesmerized by what Philip was both saying and doing. They heard the Gospel and they were moved by the signs Philip performed, such as freeing people who were possessed and curing those who were paralyzed. The author of Acts notes that "there was great joy in that city."

The discovery of Philip's success by the apostles in Jerusalem affirms the growth of the Church even more. They send Peter and John to impart the gift of the Holy Spirit to those newly baptized. While these people had been baptized in the Lord's name, Acts suggests that apos-

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 66:1–3, 4–5, 6–7, 16, 20 (1)

R. Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.

or

R. Alleluia.

Shout joyfully to God, all the earth,
sing praise to the glory of his name;
proclaim his glorious praise.

Say to God, "How tremendous are
your deeds!"

"Let all on earth worship and sing praise
to you,
sing praise to your name!"

Come and see the works of God,
his tremendous deeds among the children
of Adam.

He has changed the sea into dry land;
through the river they passed on foot;
therefore let us rejoice in him.

He rules by his might forever.

Hear now, all you who fear God,
while I declare

what he has done for me.
Blessed be God who refused me not
my prayer or his kindness!

READING II 1 Peter 3:15–18

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Peter

Beloved:

Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts.

Always be ready to give an explanation

to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope,
but do it with gentleness and reverence,
keeping your conscience clear,
so that, when you are maligned,
those who defame your good conduct in Christ
may themselves be put to shame.

For it is better to suffer for doing good,
if that be the will of God, than for doing evil.

For Christ also suffered for sins once,
the righteous for the sake of the unrighteous,
that he might lead you to God.

Put to death in the flesh,
he was brought to life in the Spirit.

This selection from Peter's letter is in the imperative voice. He is deliberately offering advice to the recipients of this letter.

Note the power here of using Christ as an example for suffering. Your assembly is meant to identify emphatically and empathetically with Jesus.

toloc authority is necessary for the completion of baptism through the conferral of the Holy Spirit. Receiving the giving of the Holy Spirit from the apostles underscores the importance of the Spirit's role in unifying the universal church. For Luke, the authority of the apostles and the unity of the Church are inseparable.

READING II The first of two epistles attributed to St. Peter is addressed to the Christians of several Roman provinces in Asia Minor. A primary purpose of the letter is to encourage Christians to

maintain their belief and continue acting in a way that reflects their faith. The short excerpt that we read today is part of the author's encouragement to endure persecution for the sake of Christ. It opens with the command "Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts." This provides a solid foundation upon which Christians can make a defense of their faith in light of persecution. A Christian's response to the challenge of a nonbeliever must be the profession of Christ's name in a gentle and reverent manner.

The author continues by suggesting that a Christian's "good conduct" will not only serve to reveal loyalty to Christ, but it will eventually "shame" the one who scoffs at it. Just as the innocence of Christ led him to suffer for the guilty, so too are those who live virtuously in Christ to consider themselves as suffering for the sake of the unrighteous. In the same way that suffering led to Christ's glorification, so will persecuted Christians be raised up in the power of the Spirit. By putting to death the things "in the flesh" (things that are the opposite of gentleness, reverence, and a clear con-

Emphasis, from the beginning, on "love" and "keep."

In somewhat oblique terms, Jesus is speaking of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus in John's Gospel makes mysterious and complex statements that your slow and steady proclamation rewards.

TO KEEP IN MIND

When you proclaim of the Word you participate in catechizing the faithful and those coming to faith. Understand what you proclaim so those hearing you may also understand.

GOSPEL John 14:15-21

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

Jesus said to his disciples:

"If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

And I will ask the Father,

and he will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows him.

But you know him, because he remains with you, and will be in you.

I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me, because I live and you will live.

On that day you will realize that I am in my Father and you are in me and I in you.

Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me.

And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him."

scious), the Christian will experience newness of life "in the Spirit." Suffering for the sake of Christ is not based on pacifism but on an ethical mandate to embody the virtues of the Lord.

GOSPEL Today's reading continues Jesus' farewell discourse given to his friends. Jesus has just finished telling them that he is the way that leads to the Father and to life eternal. The inheritance of a room in God's eternal dwelling place depends upon believing that Jesus and the Father are one. Now Jesus instructs

them that the keeping of his commandments is an expression of their love for him and their ongoing relationship with him. Observing the commandments that Jesus leaves is real proof that God dwells with them.

The major point that we are called to focus on today is the sending of a second Advocate, with Jesus understood as the first. This Advocate's role will be to animate a "seeing" of the Lord's presence; believers will see what the world fails to see. Recognition of the Son's ongoing presence through the work of the Spirit will also reas-

sure disciples of the intimate relationship that exists between the Father and the Son. Ongoing divine revelation is made known by keeping the commands and persevering in love of the Lord. Doing these things also expresses the theological theme of remaining in the Lord as a description of Christian life, which John will articulate in the following chapter when Jesus employs the image of a vine and branches to express the need to cling to him (John 15:1-17). Although Jesus must die and return to the Father, his followers should not feel abandoned. S.W.