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April 21, 2021

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“Do you understand what you are reading?” (Acts 8:30).

Acts 8:26-40; John 6:44-61

The Philip in today’s reading from Acts is not the Apostle Philip but one of the seven Hellenist deacons chosen to assist the Apostles in Jerusalem. He may have been on the road to Gaza as part of the diaspora after the stoning of Stephen when he encounters and converts the Ethiopian eunuch. The power and poignancy of this story is that the eunuch finds an intimate connection to the suffering of the figure in the passage from Isaiah and his own personal suffering. Like the lamb silent before the shearer, he had also been violently treated to render him harmless for service to Queen Candace. When Philip identifies the lamb as Jesus, the eunuch asks for baptism.

In today’s Gospel Jesus says, “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them.” The conversion of the eunuch is a clear example of the power of shared suffering to unite people, why the best evangelists are wounded healers. Philip, coming from the wounded community in Jerusalem under persecution from within and without, conveys this mystery to the eunuch. It is the suffering of Jesus that touches his heart and draws the eunuch to identify with him. The eunuch has status and he travels by chariot but still carries an intimate wound he knows he now can unite to the redemptive wounds of Jesus, who gave his “flesh” for the life of the world.

Baptism makes us one flesh with Jesus. It is inseparable from the Eucharist, which unites us to the crucified and risen Lord in the breaking of the bread. We die with him in order to rise with him. Like Jesus, we offer our lives as bread to the hungry. We empty ourselves in the service of others. All our human gifts are needed and even our smallest sufferings can be redemptive when united to the cross of Jesus.

The Word of God comes to us on the road of life to tell us that life itself in all its joys, hopes, anxieties and difficulties is where the Good News is revealed. No matter who we are and what has happened on to us on our journey, Jesus is drawing us with love to our divine destiny, life with God.

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