

Introduction to the Reading for Easter 5

Apparently, we have three basic needs – for affection, for affirmation and for a sense of achievement. The three readings today reflect these three needs and how they can be met by faith in Jesus Christ,

Old Testament: Acts 8: 26-40.

This is the well-known story of the Apostle Philip, inspired by the Holy Spirit, meeting up with the Ethiopian official. This man had obviously been drawn towards Israel's God and was reading the prophet Isaiah. Philip was able to explain to him the link between that prophecy of the suffering servant and Jesus, to which the Ethiopian was able to respond positively, seeking baptism and going on his way with his new-found faith. He must have been the first black Christian. He was a high official, Treasurer in the court of the Queen Candace, and therefore a man of influence. It is suggested that Ethiopia can be equated with Nubia, now Sudan. He must have been able to influence many others with his new-found faith and enthusiasm.

Epistle: 1 John 4: 7-21

This is an extended expression of the nature of love as found in God through Jesus Christ. We know what this love means through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross (v 10,11), which comes to dwell in us as we receive the gift of the Spirit through our confession of faith and sealed at our baptism (v15). As a result, fear, which many people find an ever-present worry, is banished for "perfect love casts out fear" (v18). The result of this is that we are to love one another, doing the very best for them that we are able. As John points out, how can we say we love God whom we have not seen, if we hate our brother whom we have seen (v20)? Belief and love go hand in hand, and it is the character that the Christian forms as a result which reaches out into society to commend Jesus to others.

Gospel: John 15: 1-8

The account of the Church as a vine emphasises the relationship between Christ and his followers and God. It is an intimate relationship as God nurtures us and cares for us, that we will be fruitful. This will only happen as we are nourished by God's love in Jesus, and bear fruit in the wider world. Cut off from the vine and there is only impoverishment and destruction. The fact of the pruning shows that we have to be prepared to discipline ourselves and grow in understanding. As we grow in faith, so our lives become closer to Christ's, and will reflect this in our daily life.