
Homily

Evensong Homily for The Feast of St. Philip
October 11, 2009
The Reverend Deacon Edward Fuller

In the name of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Every deacon in the church hopes for an opportunity to preach on the feast day of St. Philip the Deacon & Evangelist. As a deacon, I am fortunate, indeed, to be in the pulpit today, in this cathedral that claims Philip as its patron.

Philip was one of the seven ordained to be a deacon by the Apostles and the gathered church of Jerusalem in the years immediately following Jesus' death. That is to say he was ordained to be a servant to serve the Greek speaking widows who were there and who for whatever reason were being marginalized and neglected in the daily distribution of food. The first seven deacons were literally "table servants" and deacons to this day are called to serve those who are set off to the margins by society. We know that Philip served as a deacon in Jerusalem and we know that God had another call for him that expanded and complimented his diaconal work and that was a call to evangelism. In the reading we heard from Acts, an Angel directed him to the road between Jerusalem and Gaza where the Spirit instructed him to encounter an Ethiopian Eunuch. This man was a high level official in Ethiopia, actually in charge of the Queen's treasury. However, when we look at the religious culture of the day, we find that the Eunuch lived on the margins of Jewish society. He was sexually castrated and therefore considered unclean and barred from entering the temple. He lived much too far away to come to the temple and hear the scriptures read and to listen as the Rabbi's explained them. He needed a mentor, someone to explain the scriptures to him. And, of course, Philip did just that. Some believe this act by Philip was in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that God would gather the entire household of Israel, including both "foreigners" and "eunuchs" for worship in celebration of God's faithfulness to God's people. This part of the story concludes with the Baptism of the Eunuch, the gathering of him into the household of God.

I suggest that not much has changed. We still have people living on the margins and denied basic human rights. While we go about the very important work of receiving, instructing and loving those who come to this magnificent cathedral to worship God; like Philip, we are also called to go out to the dusty roads, the highways and byways of life where so many of our brothers and sisters live on the margins. Those dusty roads may well be roads we travel every day. We are called to go there to serve and to spread the good news of Jesus Christ through our words and actions. This parish sends a large group of people to feed and provide shoes for the hungry and homeless in downtown Atlanta every month. This is the true work of servant hood. But we also take them the word of God, the Good News of Jesus Christ and share the sacrament of Holy Eucharist with them. This is clearly following the example of Blessed Philip. But, Philips work was not done at that point. The Spirit of the Lord carried him away and he found himself in Azotus and later in Caesarea where he was visited by the Apostle Paul and where he continued his work as a Servant, a Deacon and Evangelist .

Like Philip, our work is not done when we leave here on Sunday. In fact, it has just begun. As Philip was called to encounter the Eunuch who lived on the margins, we continue to be called to encounter those who live on the margins - right in the midst of us. Like Philip we are called to serve them and like Philip we are called to take them the good news of Jesus Christ through our words and actions. We do that by making certain that as we go through this life we set aside time, Holy time, to work in a shelter, help our neighbors who are in need, and seeking out those on the margins to share the

Word of God with them whether we find them next door or sleeping in a doorway on a cold night in downtown Atlanta.

A few years ago, our church set aside a year for Evangelism. The "E" word conjures up images of preaching on the street corners or knocking on doors in neighborhoods with bibles in one's hands. That is, in fact, Evangelism, but there are more subtle forms that may seem less threatening and ultimately more effective. One can join the outreach group here that feeds the hungry and clothes naked feet. One can go with the women who visit prisoners in the Atlanta Detention Center. One can look around and seek out those living on the margins in our own neighborhoods and in towns nearby. We can join together to spend a few Holy hours of sharing in the lives of sisters and brothers as we saw yesterday in the first St. Philip's mission day when more than 50 members of this parish went out to work in various churches and service agencies throughout Atlanta. They went there to encounter and serve those who were born of and into our own culture but who now live on the margins of our community.

But most importantly, we can proclaim the Gospel at all times by how we conduct ourselves in family life, on the job, everywhere we go and especially at those times when much to our surprise we encounter someone who has been pushed aside from the mainstream of community life. I pray that God will endue us with all good grace to work His will at those times.

AMEN

Acts 21:8

Comments? Contact The Rev. Ed Fuller at: efuller@stphilipscathedral.org