

To my beloved friends and family in the Lord,

After reading through the passages in the Revised Common Lectionary for April 29, I decided to share with you my reflections on it.

By the way, why am I reading for April 29? It is because I've convinced pastors in the area that in being all things to all people, it may be good to have their members read the passages in the Common Lectionary since these are passages read in the Catholic churches, and better than 80% of the people in the Philippines are Roman Catholics. [They are also read in many of the large Protestant churches throughout the world.] So I meet with many of the pastors in various groups and we go over these passages together, giving them some insights, mainly from my knowledge of Hebrew and Greek, as to what are some of the specific meanings of the Hebrew and Greek words/expressions, and from my knowledge of the Scriptures as a whole.

My comments are in Green.

First reading:

Acts 8:26-40

An angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him. Now the passage of the scripture that he was reading was this:

"Like a sheep he was led to the slaughter,
and like a lamb silent before its shearer,
so he does not open his mouth.

In his humiliation justice was denied him.
Who can describe his generation?
For his life is taken away from the earth."

The eunuch asked Philip, "About whom, may I ask you, does the prophet say this, about himself or about someone else?" Then Philip began to speak, and starting with this scripture, he proclaimed to him the good news about Jesus. As they were going along the road, they came to some water; and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water! What is to prevent me from being baptized?" He commanded the chariot to stop, and both of them, Philip and the eunuch, went down into the water, and Philip baptized him. When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing. But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he was passing through the region, he proclaimed the good news to all the towns until he came to Caesarea.

May all of us be sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. It so happens that as the Holy Spirit led Philip he also led the eunuch to be reading a prophetic passage about Jesus. How often we too experience these so called "circumstances".

Comment from F.F. Bruce's Commentary on Acts 8:40: "Philip next appeared at Azotus, the old Philistine city of Ashdod, some twenty miles north of Gaza. From there he headed north along the coastal road, preaching the gospel in all the cities through which he passed, until at last he reached Caesarea. There he seems to have settled down — at least, it is there that we find him when he makes his next appearance in the narrative, twenty years later (21:8). By that time he had become a family man, with four daughters, each one a prophetess — worthy children of such a father."

Note by Kermit: The passage in 21:8 says they were prophesying - which means to speak under the influence of divine inspiration, to proclaim God's Word with or without reference to future events.

May our children and grandchildren, being influenced by us, also be prophets, encouraging God's children and sharing His Word to the many who are lost. Katanyai/May-it-happen!

The Response

Psalm 22:24-30

Deus, Deus meus

24 For he did not despise or abhor

the affliction of the afflicted;

he did not hide his face from me,

but heard when I cried to him.

From you comes my praise in the great congregation;

my vows I will pay before those who fear him.

The poor shall eat and be satisfied;

those who seek him shall praise the LORD.

May your hearts live forever!

All the ends of the earth shall remember

and turn to the LORD;

all the families of the nations

shall worship before him.

For dominion belongs to the LORD,

and he rules over the nations.

To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth bow down;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
and I shall live for him.

Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord,
and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn,
saying that he has done it.

Very likely the last sentence in this Psalm could have been the last thoughts of Jesus while he was still in His earthly flesh/body. Psalm 22 begins with

" My God, my God, why have you forsaken/abandoned me?" This expression is understood as the last words of Jesus as found in Mat. 27:47. However I personally don't think Jesus last thought was that God abandoned Him.

Three times in Matthew Jesus predicted what would happen to him (Matthew 16:21ff; 20:17ff; 26:17ff), that He would be betrayed, and suffer, and be crucified, but that on the third day he would be raised from the dead and be in His Father's Kingdom. Jesus also knew why he needed to be crucified, "to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mt 20:28) So I don't think Jesus believed that God had forsaken him. It may be that the thought briefly crossed his mind as Satan apparently did not totally give up in tempting Jesus. Luke 4:13 reads that "When the devil had finished tempting Jesus, he left him until the next opportunity came." It may that this was the next opportunity - Satan planting doubt in Jesus' mind as He was suffering on the cross, that maybe His Father had abandoned him. However it seems to me that more than likely Jesus was comforted by this Psalm. (He probably had memorized it as a youth with his peers). The Psalm was made alive to him as he witnessed the dividing up of his garments through the casting of lots (Ps 22:18 and Mt 27:35); as he heard those mocking him and wagging their heads (Ps 22:7 and Mt 27:39); as he heard the bystanders yell out "He trusts in God, let God deliver him" (Ps 22:8 and Mat 27:43). Though the thought from Satan may have crossed his mind very briefly, yet Jesus had internalized verses 3-5:

"Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

Our ancestors trusted in you, and you rescued them.

They cried out to you and were saved.

They trusted in you and were never disgraced."

And so Jesus' thought may have been, likewise I know that you will save me and I will not be disgraced since I trust in you.

We find another "Yet" in many translations in verse 9 after Jesus recounts how the bystanders were mocking him and waging their heads.

"Yet you brought me safely from my mother's womb

and led me to trust you at my mother's breast.

I was thrust into your arms at my birth.

You have been my God from the moment I was born."

Many of us raised in Christian homes can identify with these thoughts of the Psalmist and probably of Jesus as he was meditating on this passage.

Vs 26 gives me hope in what I do as a translator/missionary.

"All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD;

all the families of the nations shall worship before him."

"Families of the nations" could be understood more precisely as "clans of all the ethnic/people groups"

The last few sentences read: "future generations will be told about the Lord,

and proclaim his deliverance to a people yet unborn, saying that he has done it."

It just might be that this was the last thought of Jesus, being reassured that God has done it, delivering His people in the act that He, His son, was accomplishing at that very moment, the ultimate sacrifice for sins and the redemption of God's people.

The Epistle

1 John 4:7-21

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us.

By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. And we have seen and do testify that the Father has sent his Son as the Savior of the world. God abides in those who confess that Jesus is the Son of God, and they abide in God. So we have known and believe the love that God has for us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them. Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness on the day of judgment, because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love. We love because he first loved us. Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The commandment we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also.

This passage does not need much explanation - it is very clear what we are supposed to do - that is love one another. However with regard to "We love because he first loved us," I was reminded of what I told the soccer kids recently. Why am I out here teaching you how to play soccer and spending my time teaching you about Jesus and giving you snacks and bringing out water to you? [Note to the reader: it is very hot and humid here - we are consuming tons of water.] I let them know it is because of His love to me and so I want to show that love to His other children through my actions, so whatever love they get from me is actually the love of Jesus for them.

The Gospel

John 15:1-8

Jesus said to his disciples, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become my disciples."

Kermit's note: My number one wish is that His Word like the above gets into a meaning form for the many clans and people/language groups in the world. There are many who still do not have access to His Word, in some cases due to the Scriptures never having been translated into their language, or of poor quality, and in some cases, a lack of it being distributed to the more remote areas. Lord, as the Psalmist wrote, you acted in delivering us and we know that took place at Calvary. May that act of yours get broadcasted to the ends of the world as you said it would. Katanyai/May-it-happen!

With regard to life in San Jose, Mindoro and our various ministries, all's well for the most part, thanks to your prayers.

Yours in His service,

Kermit with Raquel