



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS **GENERAL AUDIENCE** Wednesday, 2 October 2019 [\[Multimedia\]](#)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

After the martyrdom of Stephen, the “journey” of the Word of God seems to come to a standstill, due to the rise of “a great persecution against the Church in Jerusalem” (cf. Acts 8:1). After this the Apostles remain in Jerusalem, while many Christians are scattered across other areas of Judea and in Samaria. In the Book of the Acts, persecution appears as the permanent state of the disciples’ lives, in accordance with what Jesus said: “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you” (Jn 15:20). But persecution, rather than extinguishing the fire of evangelization, fuels it even more.

We have heard what the deacon Philip did. He begins to evangelize the cities of Samaria, and the signs of liberation and healing that accompany the proclamation of the Word are numerous. At this point the Holy Spirit enters a new phase of the Gospel’s journey: he spurs Philip to approach a foreigner whose heart is open to God. Philip rises and goes with enthusiasm, and along a deserted and dangerous road, he meets a high-level official of the queen of Ethiopia, an administrator of her treasure. After being in Jerusalem for worship, this man, a eunuch, is returning to his country. He is a proselyte Jew from Ethiopia. He is seated in a carriage, reading the scroll of the Prophet Isaiah, in particular the fourth verse of the “servant of the Lord”.

Philip approaches the carriage and asks him: “Do you understand what you are reading?” (Acts 8:30). The Ethiopian responds: “How can I, unless some one guides me?” (8:31). This powerful man recognizes that he needs to be guided in order to understand the Word of God. He was the great banker, the finance minister. He had all the power of money but he knew that without the explanation, he could not understand; he was humble.

This dialogue between Philip and the Ethiopian leads us to reflect on the fact that reading Scripture is not enough; we need to understand the meaning, to find the “core” by going beyond the “peel”, tapping into the Spirit who vivifies the letter. As [Pope Benedict](#) said at the opening of the Synod on the Word of God, “exegesis, the true reading of Holy Scripture, is not only a literary

phenomenon.... It is the movement of my existence” (*Address at the Opening of the 12th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, 6 October 2008). To enter the Word of God is to be open to step outside one’s own boundaries in order to encounter and conform to Christ who is the living Word of the Father.

Who then is the protagonist of what the Ethiopian was reading? Philip offers his interlocutor an interpretative key: that meek, suffering servant — who does not react to evil with evil, and who, despite being seen as a failure, unproductive and is ultimately done away with, frees the people from iniquity and bears fruit for God — is that very Christ whom Philip and the entire Church proclaim! The one who redeemed us all through the Paschal Mystery. At last the Ethiopian recognizes Christ, requests Baptism and professes his faith in the Lord Jesus. This narrative is beautiful, but who stirred Philip to go to the desert to encounter this man? Who spurred Philip to approach the carriage? It is the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the protagonist of evangelization. “Father I am going to evangelize” — “Yes, what do you do?” — “Oh, I proclaim the Gospel and I say who Jesus is; I try to convince people that Jesus is God”. My dear, this is not evangelization. If there is no Holy Spirit there is no evangelization. This may be proselytism, advertising.... But evangelization is allowing yourself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, letting him lead you to proclamation, to proclamation with witness, even with martyrdom, even with words.

After introducing the Ethiopian to the Risen One — the Ethiopian encounters the Risen Jesus because he understands that prophesy — Philip disappears. The Spirit takes him and sends him to do something else. I have said that the protagonist of evangelization is the Holy Spirit; and what is the sign that you are a Christian woman or man, that you are an evangelizer? Joy. Martyrdom too. And, rejoicing, Philip went on his way to preach the Gospel.

May the Holy Spirit spur baptized men and women to proclaim the Gospel so as to attract others, not to themselves but to Christ; that they know how to make room for the action of God; that they know how to make others free and responsible before the Lord.

Special Greetings

I greet the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today’s Audience, especially the groups from England, Scotland, Ireland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Botswana, Australia, China, Indonesia, the Philippines, Canada, and the United States of America. In a particular way my greeting goes to the seminarians of the Pontifical North American College and their families gathered for the ordination to the Diaconate to be celebrated tomorrow. Upon all of you, and your families, I invoke the joy and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ. May God bless you!

I offer a special greeting to *young people, the elderly, the sick and newlyweds*. Today we celebrate the Memorial of the Holy Guardian Angels. May their presence strengthen your certainty that God accompanies the life journey of each of us. May they support you in proclaiming and living the

Gospel of Christ for a world renewed in God's love.

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