

In his Apostolic letter, "The Joy of the Gospel", Pope Francis declares that every Christian who has encountered the love of Jesus, becomes "a missionary disciple" through Him.

In chapters 8, 9, and 10 of the Acts of the Apostles, we see how missionaries are those who encountered, then shared with others the love of God in Jesus. After St. Stephen was martyred (Acts 7), Jerusalem became a hostile environment for Christians. God used this persecution as a means to have the disciples who had scattered, spread His Word outward to the ends of the earth. Philip had preached the Gospel successfully in Samaria, and then an angel directed him to travel the desert route from Jerusalem to Gaza. As Philip prayerfully journeyed, the Holy Spirit inspired him to catch up with a chariot carrying an Ethiopian eunuch, the queen's treasurer, who was returning from a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. (*Meditation: When traveling in a public place, are we also prayerfully tuned into the Holy Spirit, Who may direct us to speak to someone facing a life difficulty and to pray with or for that individual?*) Philip encountered the learned man as he sat in his chariot, reading the Scriptures. When Philip asked if he understood what he was reading, the eunuch asked for assistance in interpreting Isaiah 35: the prophecy of a mysterious figure despised and rejected for His people's transgressions. Philip used the Scriptures as a powerful means of proclaiming the Kerygma to the eunuch which led to his desire to be baptized.

In the video, Dr. Healy provided examples that Philip might have used to show how Jesus Christ was the fulfillment of all God said and did through people of the Old Testament: Adam's bride Eve was brought forth from Adam's rib when he was asleep; from the side of Christ on the cross, the Church was brought forth as His bride. Abraham's son Isaac carried the wood that was to be used in the sacrifice of Isaac to God; Jesus carried His cross in self-sacrifice to die for all of us.

Through Philip's explanation of Scripture, the eunuch could be baptized, as the gift of conversion was extended to the outsiders, to the marginalized in life. As predicted in Isaiah 56:3-4, the Lord's house was open to eunuchs who observe the Lord's way. The eunuch was filled with the Holy Spirit, and in his joy of belonging for the first time in his life, according to Catholic Tradition, he became the first Christian to evangelize Ethiopia.

Acts 9 shares the story of the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus, where he hoped to arrest those who lived according to the "New Way" of Christianity. Paul was a scholarly Roman Jewish Zealot rabbi who felt justified in ravaging the Church as he saw Christians following a false Messiah of a heretical sect who deemphasized the Law of Moses. In a flash of light, Jesus asked Paul "Why are you persecuting me?" Notice that Jesus totally identified with His members; He was physically present in the bodies of His followers. Paul, who was blinded, had to be led by the hand to Damascus, where he originally was going to handcuff Christian prisoners to imprison them. In the three days of his blindness, he was horrified, confused, and shocked as he realized what he had done to Jesus' people. Paul was deeply grieved as he was convicted of his sins, but simultaneously he did not feel condemned as God flooded him with grace and mercy of even greater immensity. He had been self-righteous, prideful, arrogant, full of anger and hatred. How easy to be misled if we think we are serving God without the true intimacy achieved by daily prayer and listening to Him. Through the healing by the Christian Ananias, the physical and spiritual scales fell from Paul's eyes and he now saw truth through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Paul immediately went out to evangelize with new found joy and zeal, as he humbly shared what a sinner he had been in the past, and how God brought the reality of Jesus as Savior to him.

In Acts 10, a Roman centurion named Cornelius lived in Caesarea, and he was a Godly, generous man. Cornelius was informed in a vision that he was to send for Peter in Joppa to come and preach in Cornelius' home. As Cornelius' men were traveling to Peter, Peter had been praying until a vision informed him that what God had previously declared as unclean, was now purified. Through the symbol of previously unclean food, the Spirit told Peter and his Jewish followers to go with Cornelius' men to evangelize to the Gentiles in Cornelius' home. NOW, Peter taught the Kerygma to Cornelius, his family, and friends, and the Holy Spirit dramatically fell upon them and they spoke in tongues. Peter and his Jewish friends were amazed and saw that it was a "Gentile Pentecost". Afterwards, Peter realized that the Gentiles had been marked by the Holy Spirit to be become cleansed and baptized. Who was he to argue with God?

The Acts of the Apostles illustrated the evangelization process as the apostles forged into the world to spread Christianity. As unbelievers became converted, they became full Church members through the Sacraments of Initiation: Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. St. Luke explains how the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost became the turning point of the Church. The gift of the divine light of the Holy Spirit was a gift meant to be perpetuated in the life of every new believer. After the apostles heightened the listeners' desire to forge a bond with Jesus, the first question after Peter's great speech was, "What should we do now?" Peter tells them to repent and be baptized (Acts 2:38). St. Paul declared that those who are baptized into Jesus were baptized into His death. "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4). The old self and life are put to death as new life begins with God and His people.

In the third century Church, St. Cyprian expounded upon what Baptism meant to him. He saw the stains of his past washed away, his doubts cleared up, what was hidden before became sparkingly clear, what previously seemed impossible to do, he now could do, as he broke from the sins to which his own folly had led him. Through his Baptism, the power and authority of Christ helped him to resist and reject temptation, and through the Holy Spirit, he was spurred on in growth to do the work of God in a sea of grace. The Holy Spirit gives us all Charisms, which are new gifts to build up and sustain the Body of Christ in the Church, as members become healed, enemies reconciled, and peace quells violence. So much power is unleashed by the Holy Spirit to overcome the pain of sin that is devastating our world! For those in the early church baptized as adults, from the charism of preaching, through the conversion and catechesis, it was a three-year process to help people relinquish their old ways, and to develop and sustain the love for Jesus. In a time of such alluring false gods, we desperately need to develop and share as equally dynamic and compelling love for Jesus as those earlier Church converts experienced and showed! How critical that we prioritize the Sacrament of Baptism as a sacrament of initiation, as Jesus preached that Baptism is necessary for salvation and entry into heaven.

In Acts 8, when Philip evangelized Samaria, God helped the crowds attend closely to miracles performed

and to what Philip had to say. What a contrast to the time when Jesus had initially faced hostility in Samaria, and His indignant disciples suggested fire to descend upon the people to destroy them (Lk 9: 51-54). Philip's healings were a powerful confirmation of God's timing, which caused hearts to be moved to the point that people sought Baptism. But Philip realized that a "New Pentecost" for the Samaritans had not yet occurred, so Peter and John imposed hands upon the newly baptized, and they received the Holy Spirit. This demonstrates how concerned the apostles were that the converted receive the full impact of the Holy Spirit to make their conversion perceptibly, powerfully, dramatically, and intoxicatingly alive with the gift of tongues and healing charisms, to make the conversion complete. Confirmation completes the gift of the Holy Spirit that is first given in Baptism. Confirmation increases the charisms as the Holy Spirit helps people embrace teachings and the burning desire to boldly profess and never be ashamed of the Cross. God only knows what best serves His people, as Cornelius and his gathering all received the Holy Spirit prior to Baptism by Peter (Acts 10:34-48). BOTH are essential; the dying and rising with Jesus and the manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

The "Breaking of the Bread" brings people of all races, economic levels, levels of sinfulness, and uniqueness of personalities together in unity, as Jesus forges a new bond with all of us; where we all are now brothers and sisters. In Corinthians 16-17 Paul offers: "Is not the bread we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, the many of us who share it are one body as we partake of the one loaf."

In Acts 20:7-12, Paul preached and offered the Eucharist on the first day of the week (in celebration of the Resurrection day) with the Gentiles in Troas. As Paul spoke a sermon of many hours, a lad named Eutychus (meaning lucky one), was sitting on the window sill and became drowsier with the droning on of Paul's voice. As he was lulled to sleep, he fell three stories to his death. Paul embraced him, and brought him back to life. Afterwards, truly celebrating, Paul broke the bread of the Eucharist with his followers. Embracing us and bringing us back to life from death are the signs of the Eucharist. We are fed with God so we can become another Christ and give Him to a lost and broken world. The Eucharist is the source and culmination of evangelization.