

# 1st May 2005 St Philip

## Rob Lamerton

Readings:

- Isaiah 30:18-21
- Psalm 19:1-6 page 239
- 1 Corinthians 15:1-8
- John 14: 6-14

It is an interesting coincidence that we read the same Gospel for St Philip and St James as we read for the Fifth Sunday after Easter last week. Today however, it is read because of course we find the apostle Philip in the story. Here Philip seems to show little understanding of Jesus' mission despite having been with Jesus for so long.

"Have I been with you all this time, Philip and you still do not know me?"

"Do you **not** believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?"

After questioning Philip's faith, Jesus goes on to encourage him to look at what He has been doing among his followers:  
"believe me because of the works themselves."

**AND THEN** he tells Philip (and presumably the other disciples) that they will do greater things **because** he goes away to the Father. The reference points to his ascending &38212; taking the throne on high — and bestowing the Spirit upon his people.

I notice two things in this story:

a. Philip does not appear to understand — to perceive the reality of God present in Jesus.

**BUT**

b. Jesus does not expel him — he doesn't lose his apostle's badge because of it.

Jesus simply tells Philip what will happen.

And we are reminded that *with* Philip was Thomas, still asking the difficult questions **AND** that James and John the Sons of Zebedee as well as Peter himself all misunderstood Jesus' mission and purpose at some time!

So when we look at the saints for inspiration we find that their frailties are ours as well. In fact, the inspiration comes from the fact that they were ordinary, normal, warts and all human beings who nevertheless were willing to devote themselves to being disciples, to discovering their relationship with the Father and the strength and guidance of the Spirit in the difficulties they faced.

So often we speak of Saints as being superhuman but they were **NOT!** Where the word (*saints*) is used in the New Testament it means one who is dedicated to God.

Amazing things happen when our frail humanity is dedicated to god and we walk (or try to walk) in the way of Jesus.

So the first thing to discover about Philip is his ordinariness! One of my pleasures at theological college was to be taught for a short time by Prof H Woodhouse from Trinity College Dublin — in one of his profound moments he said: "God must love ordinary people — after all — he made so many of them!"

*pause*

As we look at the gospels for more information about Philip we find that he is in the lists of apostles in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

**BUT** When we look at John's gospel we find no less than four appearances and even some dialogue. Now remember we are talking about Philip the Apostle — don't confuse him with Philip the Evangelist who appears in Acts chapter 3.

The first story about Philip is in John ch 1 after Andrew and (Simon) Peter have joined with Jesus and we hear that Jesus then "found Philip and said to him 'Follow Me'."

There is obviously some connection between Andrew & Peter & Philip because Philip is from Bethsaida, the same place as Andrew and Peter. But Philip tells Nathaniel that they (Philip & Andrew & Peter) have found the one written about in the Law and the Prophets and it is Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth. Nathaniel's doubts about anything good coming from Nazareth are met with Philip's response "Come and See" which we have taken as a sort of slogan and invitation which we too extend to all — Come and See — Is the Lord among us or not!

Philip also appears in the story of the feeding of the five thousand in John ch 6. Jesus, we are told, tests Philip by asking about bread to feed the crowd — Philip appears wanting as he says two hundred denarii (200 days pay) a bit over six month's pay would not be enough and it is Andrew who finds the boy with the loaves and fish.

The other place Philip appears is in chap 12 vs 20, 21 when the Greeks who had come to the passover came to Philip wanting to see Jesus. Philip went to Andrew and together they approach Jesus. Some have suggested that because of this Philip was shy or lacked confidence.

We get the picture of one who is sure about Jesus, but is baffled by the problem of feeding the crowd, lacks confidence and is uncertain about his faith

and yet, he is at the heart of some of the very special events and stories in John's gospel.

I have felt for a long time that Philip was the source of these stories and may well have travelled with John into Phrygia and Ionia (modern day Turkey) because tradition has it that Philip died at Hierapolis and John at Ephesus

about 150 kilometres away.

It seems John was not afraid to reveal the normality, even the frailty of Philip, because in and through his humanity as one open and dedicated to God, willing to follow as a disciple and apostle, God's spirit was at work.

*A young boy was asked after being shown through a wonderful cathedral and seeing all the stained glass: "Who are the saints?"*

*His answer was: "The ones who let the light shine through."*

The story of Philip the apostle (and martyr) is a story about ordinary humanity and frailty but also about the struggle of faithfulness and commitment and God shining through.

"Come and See" said Philip.