

Midweek reflection notes – 29 April

Acts 8: 1b-8; Ps. 66:1-6; John 6:35-40

Celebration of Catherine of Siena: she is a doctor/teacher of the church, and the patron saint of Europe, Italy, and Rome. She was a tertiary Dominican (Order of Preachers), thus a layperson not living in a cloister. She was a reformer and contributed to the return of the papacy to Rome from Avignon.

Looking at the readings: central idea that Jesus does not lose that which the Father has given to him. Indication of the Reformed doctrine of the preservation of the elect, but in a more general sense the faithfulness of God's character. That should give us hope in times of crises.

How does Jesus preserve the ones that belong to him? – By feeding them. In one of the seven 'I AM' sayings in John's gospel, Jesus affirms his divinity as the 'Bread of Life from heaven.' Within the passage there is a clear kenosis (emptying of himself) in the *missio Dei* (sending of God). Our Eucharistic theology has obvious references to this. The OT parallel is that of manna from heaven, which is closely associated with the giving of the Torah. The Law is the moral guide and wisdom to righteousness and happiness in life, i.e. salvation/rest.

In the letter to the Hebrews, the author states that the church should not harden their hearts like the Israelites in the wilderness, but should strive to enter into the rest/salvation that Jesus Christ has procured for us. In the wilderness following the pace of God, made pertinent through the Sabbath, ensured provision and salvation. We should not follow our own or another's pace. In Mark's gospel, as Jesus and his disciples are travelling on the Sabbath, they pluck the heads of grain and eat it. The Pharisees then accuses them of working on the Sabbath, to which Jesus respond that the Sabbath was made for people, not the other way round. He goes on to explain in the same discussion that new wine should not be poured into old wineskins but into new ones. There is also the account of Jesus on his way to Jericho and stopping at the blind man, Bartimaeus who receives healing. The pace of God in 'Sabbath' is to bring salvation.

Within this development and truer understanding of the Sabbath that Jesus wants to get across, an exchange should happen. It is an exchange of Nihilism (meaningless existence and unanswered questions) for a future. St Catherine's life resembled this in her pursuit of the church to exchange mental pragmatism for truly believing. Christianity without salvific actions is a dead religion, as Philip demonstrates in his ministry.

Giving Jesus to people it is to satisfy their deepest, most intimate longing and questions. Within Philip's ministry the power of forgiveness and reconciliation is also evident. He went to the Samaritans that were rejected by the Jews, but not by God. We also see a clear compatible relationship between God's sovereignty and the church's responsibility. In a devastated world, our responsibility is to offer people the new life and ultimate satisfaction in Jesus Christ.