

The Fifth Sunday of Easter

May 22, 2011

Acts 7:55-60

Psalm 31:1-5, 15-16

1 Peter 2: 2-10

John 14:1-14

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

“What is to prevent me from being baptized?” so asked the Ethiopian traveler of Philip.

Actually, that was asked of me by my dental hygienist in Savannah several years ago. Not at all the conversation one expects at such times. When I could finally respond, I said, “Nothing, and why do you ask?”

Her name is Kathleen, a good Irish name in a very Irish-Catholic city; I just would have assumed that she had been baptized, but somehow it hadn’t happened. Then, as an adult, she began to take part in yearly missions to Belize, with Episcopalians, of course. Something touched her; she felt drawn to the Church, or to the faith; she was quite serious.

So she was baptized in a beautiful old garden in Savannah, by a fountain, with the staff as witnesses, by water in a dental bowl.

The Ethiopian was touched, too. Was it what he was reading? I doubt it. I think God touched Him as surely as He touched Kathleen, and having been touched, he went “on his way rejoicing,” a child of God.

It is, as 1 John tells us, “Not that we loved God, but that He loves us.” In that baptism, Kathleen, and all that have ever been baptized, are adopted by God: we become His children. He “abides in us, and we in him.” We are one with Our Lord Jesus Christ, connected to Him and centered upon Him as branches to a vine.

“Abide.” In the Greek the word is *meno*. It means far more than abide. Greek words are subtle; they have many meanings to choose from. Perhaps the better meaning is “remains.” Baptism is permanent and indelible. The presence of God remains in us always, and, more subtly, the word implies a very close affiliation and relationship like a child to a father. “This is my beloved child.”

Then too, it means “endure.” That new identity can endure all the distractions and temptations that can draw us away from God. How? Because it is God’s volition that we be His children and nothing, absolutely nothing can be greater than His will.

It means “persevere,” a call to face those distractions with courage, secure in the knowledge of who we are.

The call to Kathleen and to all baptized, to you and to me, is a call to faith and security.

In His Holy Name.