

Paul's Love for His People

Ordinary 19A 2014

Throughout the summer, we have been reading from St. Paul's letter to the Romans. This letter deserves our attention because it provides us with a profound understanding of how God saved us in Jesus Christ. It teaches us how God freed us from the power of sin, gave us the gift of the Spirit and the promise of resurrection life. But in today's reading St. Paul begins a new section of this letter in which he deals with the failure of his own people, the Jewish people, to embrace the gospel.

Paul begins with a personal statement in which he affirms his abiding love for his kinsmen. Filled with sorrow and anguish because they have not accepted the gospel, he says he would be willing to be separated from Christ if this could bring his kinsmen to faith in Christ. Paul then goes on to list the privileges that God bestowed on the Jewish people: The glory of God dwells in their temple and they enjoy the worship of the temple. God gave them the Law of Moses, which enabled them to know God's will. They are the beneficiaries of God's promises and blessings. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are their ancestors. Finally, and most importantly, the Messiah came from them.

It is not surprising that Paul is so concerned about his people. For, if they have received so many privileges, why have they failed to embrace the gospel? What will their future be? As we will see next week, Paul is quite insistent that

God has not rejected his people, and he is filled with hope and confidence that in God's way, and in God's time, his people will be saved.

Despite Paul's affirmation of love for his people and their central role in the drama of salvation, we have witnessed a tragic history of anti-Semitism that is justified in this way: The Jewish people rejected Jesus as the Messiah and put him to death, therefore, God has rejected them, and they are no longer God's people. *Although this view is false, it has become the excuse for some people to treat the Jewish people with hatred and contempt.* This anti-Semitism came to its climax in Nazi Germany during the Second World War when six million Jews were put to death for the simple reason that they were Jews.

What Saint Paul writes should dispel any notion that God has rejected the Jewish people as his people. Paul is insistent that God's promises are irrevocable, that God remains faithful to his people. Paul proclaims that in God's way, in God's time, God will save his people.

Every time we celebrate this Eucharist, we proclaim the death of Jesus, the *Jewish* Messiah. Our Catholic faith is intimately united to the faith of the Old Testament. How foolish it would be for us to engage in any kind of anti-Semitism. As we celebrate this Eucharist, we pray for the Jewish people from whom Paul and Jesus, the *Jewish* Messiah, came forth. We pray for the good of the Jewish people whose faith is at the origin of our Catholic faith.