

## Nineteenth Sunday of the Year

This weekend I am basing my homily not on the Gospel Reading but rather on the Second Reading (Romans 9:1-5) which is taken from Chapter 9 of Saint Paul's letter to Romans. Saint Paul's letter to the Romans is the longest of his letters that we have in the Bible and it covers a variety of topics. Chapters 9 to 11 cover Paul's attitude to the people of Israel, and normally we would have another extract from this section next week (Romans 11:13-15.29-32) although we won't do so this year as next weekend we will be celebrating the Assumption of Our Lady. However I commend both these passages and the other material from these three chapters to your scripture reading and prayer during the coming week.

Although Paul recognises himself as the 'apostle of the gentiles (the pagans)' he still has a special place in his heart for his brothers and sisters of Israel, his own flesh and blood. He is filled with sorrow and mental anguish because they have yet to accept Christ, but he sees this temporary rejection as the providential means that makes possible his mission to the pagans. As he says in the passage that would have been read next week, 'I am proud of being sent to the pagans, but the purpose of it is to make my own people envious, and in this way to save some of them'.

So we can sum up Paul's attitude as this: he has a great love for his own people, he longs for them all to accept Christ, however he also believes that they are not in any way lost because God will remain faithful to the promises he has made to them.

As we all know there was no great conversion of the people of Israel to Christ but over the decades and centuries after Paul wrote these words Christians and Jews developed their own separate identities gradually growing apart from one another. It would not be too long before Christian preachers and writers, who did not have the same family connections as St Paul did, would begin to preach and write about Jews and Judaism in a very negative way. It is a long and unhappy tale and touches our own city of Lincoln with the story of 'Little Hugh' [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little\\_Saint\\_Hugh\\_of\\_Lincoln](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Little_Saint_Hugh_of_Lincoln) Such negative religious attitudes undoubtedly played some part in allowing a more racially motivated anti-Semitism to develop in more recent centuries which ultimately led to the horrors of the Holocaust that unfolded under the Nazi regime in the 1930s and 1940s.

Following World War 2 Christians had to face up to their history and the way they had regarded Jews and Judaism for many centuries. In the Catholic Church a great moment of change was Vatican 2 and specifically in this matter the document 'Nostra Aetate' which spoke of the common spiritual heritage of Christians and Jews and deplored all hatreds, persecutions, and displays of antisemitism levelled at any time or from any source against the Jews (Nostra Aetate paragraph 4). I have heard it said on more than one occasion that this was the most positive Christian statement in relation to Jews and Judaism since those three chapters of Saint Paul's letter to the Romans from which this homily began.

Recent events in this country have reminded us that antisemitism is still around and as Christians conscious of our own history we need to have a particular awareness of this. In Lincoln we have two small Jewish communities representing different religious traditions within Judaism and we also have an active Council of Christians and Jews which I personally

try and support and I know that other parishioners do too. The late Father Colin Taylor who was at Our Lady's for many years was also an active supporter of this group. In more recent years there have also been some meetings which have brought Christians, Jews, and Muslims together for a shared meal and shared conversation and I hope we will find a way of renewing those contacts soon even despite the pandemic.

So there are things for us all to take on board and try to do. Whether it is becoming more aware through reading and study, whether it is in reaching out to people of other faiths especially members of the Jewish community, or whether it is in speaking out against all discrimination based on nationality, race, or religion. Our Jewish brothers and sisters still await the coming of the Messiah, as Christians we long for Christ to 'come again'. Perhaps it will only be when he does that we will realise that the hopes of both communities are fulfilled because God never takes back his gifts or revokes his choice. May God be for ever blessed! Amen.

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