

'Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.' By saying so to his disciples in sending them out, Jesus ignores the largest alienated classes, the Gentile, the non-Jews, whether they are white, black or yellow. In other words, Jesus' ministry is rather parochial, only to the lost sheep of Israel. Jesus' saying and mission, in the present climate, is rather racist! The authorization for the Gentile mission was given, according to Matthew, and Luke, only after the resurrection. However, in the Book of Acts, Luke reports that the decision to embark upon Gentile mission was not easily taken.

Today's gospel reading, Matthew 10:5, Jesus was emphatic in forbidding his disciples to engage in Gentile mission at all. With respect to the rather different questions of the status of Samaritans Jesus was known to have taken liberal attitude, perhaps this was to do with the reunification of Israel, therefore should not be regarded as how he related to those who were outside Israel by any reckoning.

Now we mustn't forget recorded in the gospels there are two stories in which Jesus performs healing miracles for the Gentiles, the Markan story of the Syrophenician woman; and Matthew's and Luke's story of the Capernaum centurion. So one wonders whether Jesus was consistent in his attitude towards the Gentiles. Some scholars tend to think that these two stories were apologetic compositions from the period of early Gentile mission. Well said by someone in historical discussion: All great questions have their gestation periods as well as their moments of crisis. I think the two synoptic narratives of the Gentiles are not invention of the post-Ascension period. The question of Gentiles was looming on the horizon, even in Jesus' time, though not yet taken a more prominent position. In other words, these two narratives must have derived from earlier period.

So why would not Jesus remain silent and leave the Gentiles out of the picture completely. Why should he mention them emphatically in such seemingly derogatory remark?

The urgency in the mission, as commanded by Jesus to his disciples, and as told in the first half of today's gospel reading of Matthew 9:35-end, tells us their task is the preaching of judgement on Israel. And as Jesus and the gospel writers understood the OT, when Israel finally would be judged, the nations would be gathered to Jerusalem. There were Gentiles all around in Jesus' time; Capernaum

itself was the neighbouring city to Jesus' home. In other words, the presence of Gentiles in the Promised Land was a sign itself that the judgment of God of Israel was about to accomplish. Of course, that requires a prophetic insight to see the link between the two.

The writer of John's Gospel seems to understand Jesus' prophetic insight. He reports to us an incident just before the Passion was about to begin; some 'Greeks' who have come to Jerusalem to worship seek an audience with Jesus through his disciples. Jesus greets the request with an exclamation that 'the time has come!' (12.23). The world is to be judged; he himself will be exalted; he will draw all to himself. The arrival of Gentiles in Jerusalem is the sign of the moment of crisis. Jesus understands its significance and captures it successfully.

'The time has come!' These words of Jesus inform us: there is order in God's salvation plan. When Jesus completes his task in Jerusalem, the defeat of Satan on the Cross, this would also be the time of Israel being restored. When Israel is restored, not as a political entity but in terms of a person, the King of the Jews, Jesus; she has been given the vocation to be the light of the world. In other words, through her the Gentile would also come into the Kingdom of God. Jesus himself has said, 'I am the light of the world.' Hence, it is after Jesus' death and resurrection, His Gospel becomes spread to the Gentiles.

It is however through the apostle to the Gentiles, St. Paul who comes to understand the faith community is now the New Israel. The Christian church being the New Israel must continue, according to God's order of salvation plan, to carry out the vocation to be the light of the world.

But the apostle Paul knows that he could not proclaim the message exactly the same as Jesus' disciples. He could not simply proclaim, 'the Kingdom of God is at hand'. In fact we find in Paul's letters rarely does he mention the Kingdom of God. The Gentiles would have no clue what the Kingdom of God meant, let alone want to enter it. The apostle Paul, after conversion, comes to understand he would have to make Jesus' message adaptable to Gentiles' mind. But, at the same time, he cannot **not** make the Gospel message become a timeless truth: that is, to discard the historical dimension of the death and resurrection of Jesus. In short he cannot simply equate the Kingdom of God to LOVE as many modern folks try to do. Paul realizes Jesus in his life-time invited sinners to enter into his kingdom by eating and drinking with them, and eventually established the Kingdom of God

through dying on the cross and being raised from the dead. Paul reinterprets what Jesus had said and done so that his kingdom message will be understood and accepted by the Gentiles.

Today's epistle reading of Romans 5.6-11 is one of the most important pieces of writing in human literature. Paul classifies humankind into five groups as perceived then by the world's understanding: the weak, the ungodly, the righteous, the good, and the sinner. I suppose most contemporary people would agree with such classification of humankind. Good and bad are mixed together in human society. However, Paul goes one step further: he lumps all five groups together and they all become enemy of God. It is not just the sinner who is enemy of God. The whole humankind, including the good and the righteous, is enemy of God. In other words, from Jewish point of view, Gentiles would not be allowed to enter into the Kingdom of God because they were enemy of God. But Paul goes even further, no humankind, not even Jews are able to enter into the Kingdom of God while remaining as the enemy of God.

Often we tend to think chapter 13 of 1 Corinthian is the best on Christian understanding of love. It might be so. However, in this passage Paul introduces love not as a demand, but as a present reality, a sure sign of the Kingdom of God has come to the world, made real by the presence of the Holy Spirit.

And from now on, whenever the Christian Church proclaims the message of the Kingdom of God, we must make it clearly known: Christ died for the ungodly, sinners are justified by his blood, saved by Him from the coming wrath. The enemy of God is now reconciled to God by his death. In short, salvation is now available for all people if we accept who we are, sinners and enemies of God. This is what love all about.