

GOD'S LOVE IS IRREVOCABLE

20TH Sunday Ordinary Time

Year A

Is 56:1, 6-7; Ps 67:2-3, 5, 6, 8; Rom 11:13-15, 29-32; Matt

15:21-28

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According to Jewish tradition, Rabbi Joshua ben Hanania once went to Athens to dispute with the Greek philosophers. There they asked him many questions and he was able to answer them all. One of the questions they asked him was: "Where is the center of the earth?" Rabbi Joshua pointed with his forefinger to a spot on the ground where he stood and said, "Here." They said to him, "How do we know that you are correct?" He answered, "Bring your measuring rods, and measure it for yourselves."

Now why did the Greek philosophers ask the Jewish Rabbi about the center of the earth? Well, it's because the Greeks believed that Greece was the center of the earth. The Greeks divided humanity into two parts; either you are a Greek or else you are a barbarian. In the Delphi Temple in Athens, they had a sacred object known as the "omphalos" or the

“navel” of the earth. But the Greeks knew that the Jews also had a similar belief. The Jews also believed they were the center of the earth. Like the Greeks, they also divided the world into two parts. You are either a Jew or you are a Gentile. Even till today, in the Church of the Resurrection by the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, there is a wooden structure also known as the “navel” of the earth. The Greeks asked the Rabbi about the center of the earth because, in the simple logic of the philosophers, there can be only one center of the earth. If it was true that the navel of the earth was located in the Delphi Temple, then the Jewish claim that it was located in their Jerusalem Temple was false...and vice versa. By pointing to the ground on which he stood as the center of the earth, the wise Rabbi was saying that the center of the earth was not just Athens or Jerusalem, but any spot where

a human being stood. He was saying that there was not just one center of the earth. And the wise Rabbi is correct! Any point on the surface of the globe can be the center of that globe.

Now, how does this relate to what Paul is discussing in the second reading from Romans? Paul is discussing the subject of God's dealings with humanity...and the place of the Jewish nation within humanity. As a Jewish Rabbi himself, Paul did not have any doubts in his mind about Jerusalem being the center of the earth. He believed that the Jews were exclusively the chosen people of God. The Jerusalem Temple he believed to be the one house on earth where God literally resided. Something happened though to make Paul question these neat assumptions. Of course, it was his conversion to Christianity where he saw that the Gentiles, as well as

the Jews, were equally loved by God and equally called to be God's people. This was later reinforced by the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans in the year 70AD. If God literally lived in the Jerusalem Temple, how could God allow the pagan Romans to destroy His own house? Where then was God, since God's home was no more?

In his earlier life, Paul belonged with the Jews who claimed that they were God's only beloved people. In his later life, however, he belonged with the mainly Gentile Christians who claimed that, since the Jewish population rejected Jesus and his message, that the Jews were now rejected from being God's people; and they, the Christians, had become the new chosen people of God. Well, St. Paul was not satisfied with this either/or, black and white, approach to God's covenant. He reminds the Gentile Christians

that “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable”

(Romans 11:29), so God could not have rejected the

Jewish people. Like Rabbi Joshua ben Hanania in

our story, Paul had come to the realization that being

people of God was open to everyone, Jew or Gentile.

No one is qualified by national or religious affiliation

alone...and by the same token, no one is excluded

either. Rather, God has made a level playing field for

all of humanity. We heard at the end of the second

reading in Romans: “For God has imprisoned all in

disobedience so that he may show mercy to all”

(Romans 11:32).

Unfortunately, there are too many people in our

world today, 2 millennia after St. Paul, who still

believe that God is their exclusive possession. They

still believe that they, and they alone, have sole access

to the mind and blessings of God. These narrow-

mindful believers are found in practically all religions, including Christians, Moslems, Hindus, and Jews.

Such people oppose dialogue, believing that anybody who does not share their religious convictions is either a heretic or an infidel, to be corrected or even punished.

Today we pray that God may make us and all who call on God's name to realize the important truth He taught Peter and the other Apostles 2,000 years ago—Quote: "Truly I perceive that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him"...Acts 10:34&35.

And all the people said: AMEN! And Amen....

May Jesus Christ be praised...now and forever!

God bless you....