

THE CHOSEN PEOPLE

All throughout the Scriptures, Old Testament and New, there is a common theme. It is that God has chosen the Jewish people peculiarly as his own. In today's modern mindset we are uncomfortable with such a thought. Uncomfortable that God would single out a particular people for some special purpose or reason. We are much more comfortable with a world where everyone gets a participation trophy and everyone is special, and like life in Lake Wobegone—"All the women are strong, all the men are good looking and all the children are above average."

Among all the peoples who have ever lived on this earth only one has been referred to as The Chosen People. The Jews. The Hebrew People. It began with Abraham being called by God to leave Ur of the Chaldees almost four thousand years ago to travel to the land that God would give him and his descendants. This is the land we now call Israel. It was the Promised Land, a land that was promised to Abraham and his descendants, flowing with milk and honey. It was this same land that was inhabited by Isaac and Jacob and his twelve sons. It was to this land that Moses led the Hebrew people out of slavery in Egypt into the desert of Sinai and to the edge of this land. It was this land that the Jews were exiled on different occasions in their history and to which they were able to return and be restored. This persisted until the time of Jesus. The Jewish people were the Chosen People. The Jewish people are still the Chosen People. It was to them that God's only begotten Son was sent in human form.

The American humorist and poet, Ogden Nash, dashed off a little snippet of poetry about this truth. *How odd of God/To choose the Jews.* Those eight words do manage to capture and summarize an attitude that exists toward the Jewish people even to this day. In the Jewish mindset the whole world was divided into those who were Jews and those who were not Jews, referred to as Gentiles. For such a small people that is a bit over the top it seems. But then we Catholics often tend to divide the world into Catholics and Non-Catholics. Hmm.

But the choosing of the people is the thing. Why? Why did God do this? God does nothing without a purpose. God chooses the Jews. From ancient times they are the only people on earth who do not believe in a multiplicity of gods and goddesses. They believe that there is one God. That was their simple claim to fame. It also happened to be fundamentally sound and authentically true. One God. God decided to work with that. They became his favorites. But it was never an easy relationship. His people were not always a faithful people or a responsive and obedient people. Not always a grateful people. But God never rejected them even in their infidelity. God never gave up on them. Never has.

But here's the thing. God chose the Jewish people to be his people. He chose them so that He could be a special blessing for them but not for them alone. A blessing upon them but a blessing to be spread to all the other people of the world through them. Chosen and Chosen For. Which brings me to the readings for today. Isaiah the prophet is speaking to the Jewish people about their responsibility to "observe what is right and do what is just." For the world to see. And then Isaiah says: "Even the foreigner who joins himself to me...I will bring to my holy mountain."

And in Saint Paul's letter to the Christians at Rome some of whom are of Jewish origin and some of whom are of Gentile origin, Paul speaks of his mission to the Gentiles in the hope that it

will actually arouse a kind of jealousy in the Jews who do not yet believe in Jesus and draw them into the faith.

And then in the gospel we have the story of the Canaanite woman out on the Mediterranean seacoast, pagan territory where Jesus and his twelve apostles have traveled for some R & R. But even in the ancient world, word travelled. Everyone in that part of the world had heard the stories of the Holy Man from Galilee who healed and cast out demons. Word spread. People were on the lookout. So was this woman. She was not a member of the Jewish religion. She was a woman with a big problem—a daughter in the grips of a demon. She just wanted help. She was desperate.

Jesus knows that his primary mission is to the people of Israel first but then to be the means by which God's light and truth is conveyed to the rest of the world. Jesus is testing her in this scene. Trying to get a sense of who she is and what he is facing. He is silent and unresponsive and then asked to dismiss her. Then He, in effect, is bantering back and forth with this woman. He knows what she is asking. He is testing whether she really believes in him and the power he brings. And so he jousts with her.

In effect he is saying, "You know, my dear that your people call us Jews, dogs. And we call you dogs too. What I bring will nourish and feed the People of Israel. It is not right to just give it to everybody, especially to you who hate our people. It would be like taking children's food and throwing it to the dogs. Not right." Her response cuts through his jousting. "Even the dogs get crumbs. That's all I'm asking Jesus, some little crumb for my sick daughter. And you can do that if you choose." She believes. And he responds with grace. It is not as harsh as it might seem. And now, recall that line from Isaiah: "Even the foreigner who joins himself to me...I will bring to my holy mountain." Isn't that precisely what is happening here? And the outcome is vintage Jesus.

My friends, every person on this planet came forth from the mind and heart of our creating God. It is the will of God that all be saved and none be lost. In God there are not goodies and baddies. There's just us and we are all sinners to one degree or another. All in need of being saved. In Jesus Christ salvation has been brought to this earth for one and all—beginning with the Jews but extending to all people no matter their circumstances, lives, ethnicity, gender. Can we hear with new ears? Can we align our own hearts and minds to his?

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.