

## 20th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Last week I was in Maynooth, Ireland, for the biannual meeting of Societas Liturgica, an international, ecumenical group of specialists in worship. I gave a presentation to some of my colleagues about the ecumenical roots beneath the scriptures for Mass. The readings we now hear every Sunday debuted in 1970 and cycle every three years. The group that the Vatican appointed to revise our readings first studied those from dozens of other denominations from Syro-Chaldeans to Norwegian Lutherans. The revisers for the Catholic lectionary gathered all this evidence from other Christians and put it on the table for respectful analysis before establishing the readings we use today.

One person listening to my talk asked if the revisers who showed such deference to other Christians showed similar openness to the Jewish people. On the spot, I couldn't think of much except that we now hear a generous portion of the Old Testament on Sundays, something that did not happen much in the Catholic Church prior to 1970. However, there are two specific examples of respect for our Jewish brothers and sisters, one of which is today's second reading. First of all, each year on Easter Sunday, the first reading from Acts of the Apostles recounts how Peter announced the resurrection to new believers in the household of Cornelius. Acts contains other examples of the apostles preaching the resurrection, but many of those denounced Jewish people for their unbelief. The specific passage we hear each Easter was chosen to avoid giving unnecessary and distracting offense to Jews.

Also, every third summer, like this one, we have a series of second readings from Paul's Letter to the Romans. We hear highlights from that letter, but not all of it. In Chapters 9 through 11 Paul criticizes many of his Jewish brothers and sisters, and his words today would require a lot of explanation, so the lectionary skips most of those chapters. But it includes the verses of today's second reading, which says of the chosen people of the Old Testament, "the gifts and the call of God are irrevocable." They are always God's chosen ones. Those who revised the readings showed that Catholics can remain faithful to our own teachings while underlining what Christians and Jews share in our praise of God.

That theme dominates today's responsorial. Our refrain prays for universal belief and subsequent worship: "O God, let all the nations praise you!" We use it today because of the miracle in the gospel, where Jesus at first denies a Gentile woman's request for the healing of her daughter because his mission is to "the house of Israel," that is, to the Jewish people, not to her. She persisted, and he finally worked the cure; he found in her shared points of belief where others might find only differences. Today's first reading anticipates that insight; the Lord promises through Isaiah that he will bring to his holy mountain the "foreigners who join themselves to the Lord... and make them joyful in [his] house of prayer." The Lord says, "my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples."

Whether as a Church or as individuals, we are all called to respect people who hold other systems of belief, even as we cling to our own and invite others to meet Christ with us. Our message will be more convincing if the way we handle disagreements is respectful. Faithfulness to the gospel is more than knowing the rules: It is living them in love for all.