

(B16) SUNDAY 16 OF THE YEAR

(JULY 18TH, 2021)

Readings: *Jeremiah 23: 1 – 6; Ps. 22 (23); Ephesians 2: 13 – 18; Mark 6: 30 – 34.*

Today's reading from the letter to the Ephesians jumps forward, omitting the writer's prayer for his hearers and his description of their condition before the saving work of God in Jesus Christ.

He is writing, as a Jew, to a Church of Gentile Christians and reminding them that, before God's loving act of mercy, they were *without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world* (2 verse 12).

But now, he writes, God's act in Christ Jesus has changed all that: *You that used to be so far apart from us have been brought very close, by the blood – that is, the death – of Christ.*

In the world in which this letter was written and heard the division between Jews and non-Jews was deeply felt by both sides of the division, and that was certainly true after the Roman defeat of the Jewish army and the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in AD 70.

The division continues in our day and the Jews are still the victims of hostility in many parts of the world. In the letter to the Romans we are reminded that God's choice of the people of Israel remains valid (*see chapters 10 & 11*): and in this letter we are taught not that Christ's death has brought about the rejection of Israel, but rather that he has *made the two* (that is, Jews and Gentiles) *into one and broken down the barrier which used to keep them apart*. It may be that this teaching is addressed to a Church or Churches which had both Jewish and Gentile members.

If so, it would be a warning to the Gentiles not to think of themselves as superior to Jewish Christians, but rather to acknowledge the mercy of God by which they have been included in his chosen people.

In our world the division between Jewish and Gentile Christians is not a predominant issue, but it's still true that any group of Christians can be tempted to feel superior to others. Today's reading makes it clear that there is no place in the Church for such an attitude. *Through the cross* Christ has created *a single New Man in himself, united all in a single Body, and reconciled them with God.*

Whether we and our ancestors came early or late to faith, all have equally *in the one Spirit our way to come to the Father*. For that: **Thanks be to God in Christ!**