

Jesus changes his mind. So he's human after all. We had a wonderful celebration yesterday of my twin's 70th birthday, as well of course celebrating the Feast Day of our Monastic Congregation's founding saint, Bernard Tolomei. And Pat Briskham kindly made a cake decorated with 72 different species of bird (my twin is a keen birdwatcher). So why 72 one person asks and Pat responds ' there were two others that I really liked so I couldn't resist adding them on'. History is made up of such turning points. And Jesus changes his mind- not because of some lengthy process of academic study or debate but because a gentile woman subverts his opposition through humour, through a clever and unexpected reply, by herself adopting the position of a begging dog at his feet, such is her love for her daughter. And Jesus recognises this as faith because it touches him at the level of faith – that area of the soul where emotions and mind coincide, where compassion is possible, where we not only know love but feel it, that place that defines each of us as a human being, made in God's image, sharing a common humanity. For the vine that we are being grafted onto is not one of thought but of feeling, not one of proven lineal descent but one of love, a love which transcends all boundaries, a love which is every bit as physical as it is spiritual. Is transmitted through word and action, has to be seen to be believed.

So the original rootstock is not Israel but God and we see God at work here opening us up to the full meaning of God as love. Israel in other words was a beginning, love has to be particular before it can become universal, it has to start somewhere. But our mistake is to imagine that this particular love for a particular people is exclusive – no it is a sign that God loves us all. Jesus himself, in his humanity, has also to come to this understanding. Interestingly the bit that's missing from today's passage from Isaiah is the bit where even eunuchs, with obviously no heirs of their own, are still promised a Yad vashem – a monument and a name in the new Jerusalem. Yad vashem is the title given to the memorial in Jerusalem to those who died in the Holocaust – the terrible killing of millions of Jews in Nazi Europe. It's a memorial which is disturbing for any visitor including Christians where our part in facilitating such a mind-set is not spared. Entire families were exterminated in the Shoah leaving them with no heirs to remember them, like the eunuchs in the passage from Isaiah but they are not forgotten by God. Paul's letter to the Romans is a sort of Yad vashem reminding Christians of their duty not to forget the original people of God. When Jesus hears the cry of the poor gentile woman before him it was not in order to forget his own people but to remind us all of the universality of God's love. We do not choose God, God chooses us and chooses us to change us and perfect us in love.

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