

Changing Our Ideas Fourth Week of Easter Monday, April 18, 2016 8:15 AM
Acts 11:1-18; Jn 10:1-10 (God comes and accepts all people as they are and then moves us on to the transformation that he intends and provides for.)

“What God has made clean you are not to call profane.”

This story of St. Peter in the Acts of the Apostles is one of the turning points for the early Church. There was a problem in Judaism going way back to the time of the exile 587, even before that the destruction of the northern kingdom in 721, the problem is this: **whenever there was a terrible disaster, a trauma, some great suffering, the Jewish people interpreted that as God having abandoned them.** For that matter, I believe, that’s the way most Jewish people interpret the Shoah of the 1940s: God has abandoned us. And indeed that is a temptation. Even **Jesus quotes the psalm: “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” But that’s a psalm that leads then to the realization that God is always with us.**

But in the actual history of people they didn’t always realize that, and therefore **they worked all the harder to be worthy of God’s protection.** One of the strategies they developed was a strategy of **total separation from the nations**, segregation, apartheid, if you will, not based on color, as we might be used to in the terms of American history or South African history, but no, this is based on ethnic identity. The Jews were to live only with Jews, touch only Jews, **have nothing to do with gentiles.** And have nothing to do with them meant have nothing to do with them, including **not even eating with them.** So it is impious to eat with gentiles, as it was impious to eat food that was not approved of. They didn’t use the word kosher in those days, but there was a matter of legal, hygienic preparation; and **only certain foods could be legally eaten.**

All this was prescribed by law, and this is the undoing of all that because **Jesus’ coming into the world itself is already God being with everybody**, not just a certain people. It’s God wanting to be with everyone, and not only be with but **to suffer with**, to bear the burdens of, **to accompany with compassion all people.** Jesus himself grew up in a family that was really on the margins in the first place, not a well-established family within the elite, but more marginal, living in Galilee, not really part of the establishment. But moreover Jesus’ whole life was a life of **sharing in all things, including ultimately death.** So Jesus’ teaching is that God is with us at all times whether we know it or not, whether we sense it or not, whether we are aware of it or

not. St. Teresa of Avila says very often we have traumas and our memory of them is false because **we didn't recognize the presence of God at that time and therefore our memories need healing.** Well the memories of Judaism need healing too; **the collective memory of Judaism needs healing.** When that will happen, I have no idea, but it needs healing even to this day. And the extremes that they went on to make themselves presentable to God, acceptable to God are simply that: extremes, human extremes unnecessary, because **God comes and accepts all people as they are and then moves us on to the transformation that he intends and provides for.**

Along the way of course, practically speaking, the early Christian community had to deal with this issue because as Christianity, as the Christian faith, spread beyond the boundaries of Judaism it was obvious **they had to celebrate together the breaking of the bread.** Well that's eating; celebrating Eucharist is eating. And so **good Christian Jews said, oh we can't eat with those gentiles, even though they are baptized, and this led to this great problem for the Church.** This is what is addressed here. It's also addressed in St. Paul.

And the call was now in this new age of the risen Christ to lay aside much of what had been thought to be God's law. Lay it aside. Nothing is profane that God has created. **A lot of our ideas about the world and life aren't quite right. They don't really come from God.** They aren't really inspired. They are just what has been; **we have to be willing to let go of them if we are to be reformed and transformed into the image of Christ who is our model.** We are created to be like him. We are created for his life. And so **this is an ongoing problem,** even if we don't recognize it. **There are so many ways in which our ideas of what is right or wrong or holy or unholy have to be changed by the Holy Spirit.**