

Favourite Things



If someone gives you a box of chocolates do you have a favourite that you pick first?

Some people prefer hard-centres while others like soft ones. For some, the best chocolates are plain and there are those who look for ones with nuts in them.

Then there is the true chocoholic. Anything, so long as it has chocolate, is the absolute favourite – nothing else matters, only the chocolate.

Peter had been wrestling with the dilemma of whether new converts to Christianity should first become Jewish.

He himself had been raised as a member of the chosen people and from his earliest days the idea of being specially blessed in this way would have been part of his world view.

Some were suggesting that this was no longer the most important thing, even unnecessary. As modern Christians we are so used to the idea that we do not have to become part of Judaism to be disciples of Jesus that we can forget how momentous this question was to Peter and those like him.

After experiencing a vision and hearing God tell him to embrace those who were different his understanding changed dramatically. In this Sunday's first reading we hear how he told Cornelius, a non-Jew that he was acceptable to God as much as anyone else. Peter said he now knew the truth:

God does not have favourites.

Peter realised that for God there are no preferred groups or individuals. God does not prefer members of the chosen people to others. All that is important is to try to do what God wants.

There is a deeper truth for us to ponder. God does not even like good people more than he does bad. This does not mean God does not care how we live. He wants us to try our best to be loving and faithful. To be holy is the calling of every human being but astonishingly even when we fail live up to this it does not stop God loving us.

We might think of it in this way; God is not so much chocoholic as 'humanholic'. He loves every human being, all of us; whether we are soft-centred or hard, whether we are plain or even nuts.

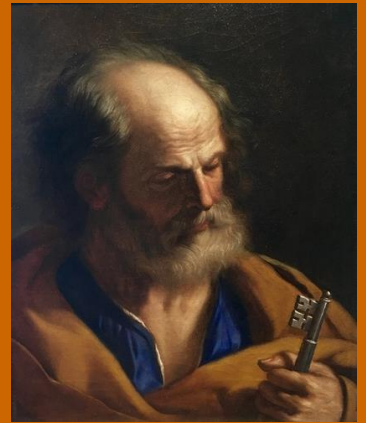
So in this Sunday's first reading we see that Peter has realised that to become a follower of Jesus and to be baptised into the family of God it is not necessary to be a member of the chosen race. Membership of the Church is open to everyone.

The reading tells us something more.

When Peter finished his explanation the Holy Spirit suddenly descended on all those who were gathered there. God was at work within them and so baptising them into the Church was the obvious thing to do.

Notice the Spirit was present in Cornelius and the others *before* they were baptised. This is a sign that the Spirit is at work in the world outside of what is seen to be the Church.

The Holy Spirit cannot be confined and is not limited to acting only within those who bear the name 'Christian'.



Jesus himself put it very clearly,

*The wind blows where it wills,
and you hear its sound,
but you do not know from where it comes
or where it goes;
that is how it is with everyone born of the Spirit.*

John 3:8