

26. April 2026

“Paul’s sorrow for his brothers and the exclusion of Jewish Christians from the synagogue”

In yesterday’s reflection, we looked at the Church and how—despite all resistance—it was able to spread, and we heard the praise of Saint Irenaeus, who extolled the unity of doctrine in the Church and emphasized that the light of God had been entrusted to her, a light now meant to enlighten the nations. The quoted passage from his writing ended with the beautiful words: *“For everywhere the Church preaches the truth; she is the seven-branched lampstand that bears the light of Christ.”*

At the end of the text, my gaze once more fell upon the Jews. I expressed the hope that they—after the terrible suffering in their history—will yet recognize the Messiah. This would be a blessing for all. Thus I concluded yesterday’s reflection. With this statement, I refer to a word of the Apostle to the Gentiles, Paul, which we should recall again and again:

“I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race. They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed for ever. Amen.” (Rom 9:1–5)

Here we encounter the loving heart of the Apostle to the Gentiles, who himself experienced the grace of conversion. He was granted the great illumination that Christ—whom he had at first persecuted—is the expected Messiah, whose followers he persecuted even unto death (Gal 1:13). We know what this meant for Saint Paul. He was called by Jesus to become a preacher of the Gospel. Like hardly anyone else, he devoted himself tirelessly to the service of the Gospel and contributed significantly to the spread of faith in the Messiah among the nations.

It caused him great sorrow that his own people, his brothers, despite all their God-given advantages and their preparation for the coming of the Messiah, did not recognize Him and rejected Him and His teaching (cf. Rom 9:1–2). Yet it was not

only sorrow for his brothers according to the flesh. Paul gives us a hint of what it would mean for the plan of salvation if the people of Israel were to find the true faith. He writes: *“Now if their trespass means riches for the world, and if their failure means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean!”* (Rom 11:12). And further: *“For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?”* (Rom 11:15).

We recognize that, with regard to God’s plan of salvation, something is still pending—that the “firstborn” has not yet, through the grace of Christ, entered the Father’s house. This remains the case to this day and is surely a source of sorrow, for God Himself chose the people of Israel so that His only-begotten Son might live among them as a human being, to fulfill the prophecy and bestow salvation.

Without neglecting concern for all other peoples, it is important for the Church to keep watch for the people of the Old Covenant and to allow the Spirit of God to show her how her proclamation and ministry can open the way for the Jews to their Messiah. The Church must never lose sight of this or even abandon it.

It was not as though all Jews had been influenced by the hostility of the religious authorities toward Christ. We know of the conversion of a great number of Jews after Peter’s Pentecost sermon. The apostles were also able to bear witness and preach in the synagogues, and—as is reported—Jews continued to come to faith. This remained possible for a time, but it changed fundamentally after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, which Jesus had foretold.

This occurred on August 30 of the year A.D. 70, at the hands of the Romans under the command of Titus. It had been preceded by the Jewish revolt from A.D. 66 to 73, through which the people sought to free themselves from Roman rule. This revolt is also known as the First Jewish War.

With the destruction of the Temple, the Jews lost their religious center, and a period of reorientation began. It was particularly associated with Johanan ben Zakkai, who sought a more conciliatory approach toward the Romans. Thus he received permission from Vespasian, the father of Titus, who had first besieged Jerusalem, to go to Jamnia, a small town near Jaffa, to instruct his students, to pray, and to keep the commandments as prescribed by the Law.

Through him, therefore, a reorganization of Judaism began that no longer depended on the Temple. A center of learning was established as an alternative to the lost capital. Here the heirs of the Pharisees now exerted their spiritual influence. The influence of the rabbis and of oral tradition grew ever stronger. This development also became a major point of contention between the Jews and the Jewish Christians.

A generation later, from the Jewish side, the boundaries of Judaism were redefined, and those whom they regarded as sects were excluded from the synagogue. They considered them a danger to their faith. Among those excluded were also those who believed in Jesus as the Messiah.

Reflection on today's reading: <https://en.elijamission.net/suffering-for-the-lords-sake/>

Reflection on today's Gospel: <https://en.elijamission.net/the-gospel-of-st-john-jn-101-10-the-good-shepherd/>