

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Ephesians 2

12 Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.

13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility,

15 by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace,

16 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.

18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household,

20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone.

21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

We are very happy to celebrate this worship service together. The scripture reading we just listened to was first directed to Christians who were Gentiles, people from various nations who had become followers of Christ. The issue, the Epistle to the Ephesians is dealing with, is the relationship of the new Christians who came from various nations and of the first Christians who came from God's chosen people the Jews.

Do we who come from various nations also pertain to God's people? Are we now included in God's covenant? This is one of the fundamental questions of the early church.

Our roots as Christians are within Israel, God's chosen people. God had made his covenant with Abraham, he had given his promise to Abraham and his descendants. But God opened his covenant to include all people, Jesus Christ became God's promise to all humankind. All of us can now be part of God's people, we have become his children, we have become fellow citizens with God's people.

In the ancient world, foreigners did not account for much, they were discriminated against. They were marginalized, they were at the bottom of society.

God, however, offers special protection for foreigners and commands his people to respect them. In Exodus 22:20 we read: "Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt."

The people of Israel are reminded that they themselves were foreigners, they share the experience of being foreigners in their collective memory.

We have seen the pictures of refugees on television, in newspapers, on the Internet – and now you are here with us. You had to leave your countries, we cannot imagine what you had to suffer in your own country, we cannot imagine what you had to suffer on your way to Germany, now you are here with us in a country where you have to start from scratch, first of all learn a foreign language and get to know a foreign culture.

We are happy to welcome you here in our country, in our city, in our church.

When we read the Epistle to the Ephesians all of us are reminded that originally we all were foreigners, separated from God. It is through Jesus Christ that we are incorporated into God's household that we have become citizens of God's kingdom.

Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household,

All of us are citizens of God's kingdom, no matter where we come from: Syria, Germany, Eritrea, Iraq, or whatever country.

Jesus Christ is the cornerstone, he is the basis of the foundation of God's house but each of us is a stone in God's building. The house would not be complete if any of us were missing.

Therefore, each of us is important. Together we are God's household. It is essential that each one of us is here. Your presence is a symbol that God has called his church from all the nations.

*[we] are being built together to become a dwelling in
which God lives by his Spirit.*

God's church would not be complete without you.

Amen.

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