

Lesson 12

PRAYERS AND SACRIFICES OF ISRAEL



Prayer is conversation with God. Praise and worship to glorify God are also forms of prayer. Prayer includes our supplication to God as well. According to the Old testament, calling upon the name of God in itself is prayer. “At that time people began to invoke the name of the LORD” (Gen 4:26). Even after building the altar for sacrifice, the patriarchs were also in the habit of invoking God's name. (Gen. 12:8; 26:25). They also used to pray in private, individually. They prayed in the morning and in the evening (Deut. 6:4 -7).

Abraham had prayed for the cities going to be destroyed as a result of their sinfulness. Moses had on many occasions conducted intercessory prayers on behalf of the Israelites. The people experienced God who responded to their prayers. The cry of the Israelites from Egypt was a prayer that reached the ears of God and He responded. Once they reached the land of Canaan, the people of

Israel offered special prayers and sacrifices to God and maintained a special relationship with God. These prayers and acts of worship were an expression of the relationship between God and man. The life of prayer and worship of the Israelites was mostly centered on the temple.

The Temple

The ark of the covenant was the symbol of the presence of God in the midst of the people of Israel. Having reached Canaan, they put up the ark in Gilgal. Later shifted to places like Bethel and Shiloh and was kept in a special tent or booth. Those places thus became the centres of worship. King David wished to erect a suitable temple to house the Ark of the Covenant. But it was Solomon the son of David who got God's grace to accomplish the act of erecting a temple.

Solomon took seven years to complete the temple in Jerusalem. For the Israelites the temple of Jerusalem was the centre for worship and expression of faith. The temple was the place that God had chosen to reveal His presence to the people of Israel. The temple of Jerusalem had a very important, central place in the life of the Israelites.

Synagogue

For centuries, the temple of Jerusalem was the place of worship for the Israelites. In later years the Jews (Israelites) were exiled and they were not able to have the temple as the centre for worship. They had to find other means to conduct their worship. It was at this stage that they built synagogues. The word synagogue is derived from the Greek word sunago meaning 'get together'. Synagogues were built in a prominent place in the city or on a high place. These were built facing the holy city of Jerusalem.

On the days of Sabbath and feast days there were special services in the synagogues. Here the Torah (book of laws) was read. The synagogue was also a place of assembly for the Jews. It became a place to discuss the common problems of the people and to conduct meetings. The synagogues gave the people opportunities for a life in faith at a time when the temple and temple worship had ceased to exist.

The Psalms

The Psalms are hymns or prayer songs that were produced as a result of the special life-circumstances of the people of Israel. The Jews were in the habit of singing these Psalms during festivals and pilgrimages. The Psalms were composed in such a way that they could be sung to the accompaniment of instruments or without them. It is believed that they were composed by king David. Some of them might have been written by someone else in David's name.

There are altogether one hundred and fifty psalms in the Holy Bible. On the basis of their contents, the Psalms may be classified into praise Psalms lament Psalms and thanks giving Psalms. In these Psalms we can see clearly the deep relationship between God and His people.

Sacrifices

Right from the olden days, the people of Israel used to offer sacrifices to God. They offered sacrifices:

- . To praise and worship God,
- . To express thanks for the blessings from God,
- . To do penance for the sins committed,
- . To receive blessings from God.

When God gave the laws to Moses, particular directions regarding the offer of sacrifices were also given. Sacrifices were offered for the whole community, or for an individual. Sacrifices on the altar in the temple were offered by the priests.

The people of Israel used to perform different kinds of sacrifices for different purposes. There were offerings for peace, for penance and for atonement of sins. A sacrifice is a form of worship that people offer to God who created everything. People offer themselves to God along with the materials that they offer in the sacrifices. It is not the number of sacrifices that counts with God but the attitude with which they are offered.

The observance of Sabbath

The meaning of the Hebrew word Sabbath is 'to rest' or 'to take a break'. Taking a break from all sorts of work or labour. The day of Sabbath is to be spent in the service of God. The Israelites observed Sabbath on the seventh day of the week in remembrance of the seventh day rest God had taken after finishing the work of creation in six days.

In the Commandments that He gave through Moses, God gave the following direction: "Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work. But the seventh day is Sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work-you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns" (Ex 20:8-10). To the Israelites, the Sabbath was a day of joy, rest and worship.

Jubilee Celebration

Jubilee celebration is very important in the social life of Israel. After settling in Canaan, God commanded them that, after six years of sowing and reaping, they should observe the seventh year as Sabbath.

The year that follows a series of seven Sabbaths is the Jubilee year. 'That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you:.... It shall be holy to you' (Lev 25:11-12). God also gave special instructions on how to celebrate the jubilee. The jubilee celebrations reminded them that the land belongs to God, and brotherly relationship should exist among the people.

The Churches and Celebrations in the Church

For the new people of God, the places of worship are known as the churches. These churches are the symbols of God's presence. Holy Mass and other sacred rites are celebrated in the church. Those who join together in front of the altar of God are truly the people of God.

In the church, Sabbath is celebrated on Sunday, the first day of the week. The Christians observe Sunday as Sabbath because Jesus rose from the dead on a Sunday. Sunday is to be observed by attending Holy Mass in the parish church and involving in activities of charity. This is also the day to learn more

about Jesus For the people of Israel, the temple, the sacrifices, the worship and prayer, all were symbols of their relationship with God. But Jesus gave a new meaning for all these. When we participate in the customary rites and rituals of the church, we shall be mature enough to obey the precepts of Jesus. Thus let us become true disciples of Jesus.

Let us Pray

Almighty God, help us to behave reverently in the church and participate with piety in the Holy ceremonies.

Read the word of God and narrate

Narrate the event of the consecration of the temple at Jerusalem (1kings. 8:22-53).



Word of God for our Guidance

“Happy are those who live in your house”
(Psalm 84:4).

My decision

Participating in the Holy Mass, attending Sunday school and doing good to others, I will observe Sunday as a Holy day.

Let us do

Write the first four sentences of Psalm 84

Let us find out the answer

1. What is the importance of the temple of Jerusalem?
2. How did the name synagogue come into being?
3. On the basis of the content, how are the Psalms divided?
4. What were the intentions for which the Israelites offered sacrifices?
5. How should we keep Sunday Holy?