

5 tips for mealtime prayer

Our Torah portion today includes a verse (Deut. 8:10) which is considered by the Jews to be the basis of the Jewish practice of praying a prayer of blessing after a meal. In light of today's Torah reflections, including the focus on the gift of the *land* (repeated seven times), how can we be more thoughtful in our own Christian tradition of praying 'grace' at meal-times? Five suggestions follow.



Read from Deut. 8:10 "You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you." Try including this verse in your meal-time prayers from time to time.



Pause a little longer than usual to remember and wonder at the 'hidden' miracles of this ordinary day. Tell each other what you 'saw' and 'heard' that revealed the hand of God at work.



Name. Don't just thank God 'for our food,' but rather name the specific joys of this meal: the bread, the meat, the vegetables, the fruits, the wine, the table setting, the individual persons at table...



Count the extraordinary number of steps that led up to this meal on your table: the seed sown in the earth, the rains, the labor of farmers, the transport, the processing, the purchase, the cooking...



Remember the fruitfulness of the Holy Land, where the story of God's intense involvement in human history all began. Pray for the Holy land and all who inhabit it and draw on its fruits to this very day.



In the Light of Torah

Ancient texts
through fresh eyes,
alive for today.

Why reflect on Torah?

At a meeting in Rome in 1982, Pope John Paul II urged bishops and other church leaders to study the relationship between the Church and Judaism, and to take special care with the way Judaism is presented in Catholic teaching:

'We should aim, in this field, that Catholic teaching at its different levels, in catechesis to children and young people, presents Jews and Judaism, not only in an honest and objective manner, free from prejudices and without any offences, but also with full awareness of the heritage common [to Jews and Christians].' (6.3.82)

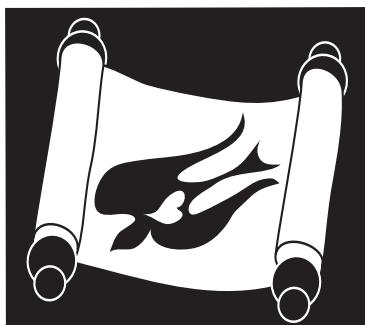
The Pope's statement was more than a warning against anti-Semitic attitudes; it positively embraced the 'great spiritual patrimony' and 'spiritual bonds' linking Jews and Christians (see *Nostra Aetate*, 4) and urged that these bonds permeate the experience and teaching of the Christian faith.

This leaflet series *In the Light of Torah* takes up this call by helping Christians to become more aware of the Torah as a gift of the Jewish faith and the foundation of the New Testament scriptures. 'Torah' (in its specific sense) refers to the first five books of the Old Testament.

By opening ourselves to the rich heritage of Jewish thinking, methods and sources concerning the biblical text, our own Christian appreciation of God's Word is nourished and expanded.

In the Light of Torah is a parish leaflet series designed to encourage Christians to be more attentive to the gift of Torah as part of their own sacred Scriptures, and to the gift of Judaism which gave us Jesus, the Living Torah. Text by Teresa Pirola. Illustrations by Francine Pirola. © The Story Source, 2009. Further reading: www.batkol.info. Reproduction of this leaflet permitted for non-commercial church use.





Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar
of Torah readings:

Deuteronomy 7:12-11:25

In the Torah we find repeated instances of the Israelites being warned to ‘remember’ and ‘observe;’ that is, to remember God’s saving acts in history, and to observe the commandments so as to enjoy continued blessings. In Jewish biblical interpretation, the Torah never repeats itself without good reason! Repetition calls for the reader’s careful attention. In this spirit, let’s explore an example of this repetitious theme.

Sources: Eskenazi & Weiss, *The Torah: A Woman’s Commentary* (NY, 2008); Leibowitz, *Studies in Devarim* (NY, 1996); *The Artscroll Interlinear Siddur* (NY, 2002); Scripture quotations: *NRSV*.

Tasting Torah

Read Deuteronomy 8:7-11 and 8:12-18. Here we find two passages which are quite similar. Each describes the blessings of living in the Promised Land, and each follows with a warning not to forget ‘the Lord your God.’ Though similar passages, there are differences. Can you pick them?

Touching Torah

The first describes the prosperity of the Israelites in terms of the natural fertility of the land, a land of running waters and unlimited supplies of grains, fruits, vegetables and minerals. Seven times the word *eretz* (‘land’), appears in this passage. Note how the flow of the text conjures up a picture of lush countryside, abundance, profound satisfaction. But why the warning about forgetting the Lord and failing to keep his commandments? What might be the temptation facing the Israelites as they come upon this land flowing with milk and honey?

The second passage also describes the prosperity of the Israelites, but this time in terms of the works of their hands after some time of settlement: fine houses, numerous herds and flocks, riches of silver and gold. Yet, once again, the bright picture is suddenly clouded with a warning about ‘forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt’ (8:14). What might be the temptation contained in this second description of blessing as the Israelites ‘settle in’ to their long-awaited Promised Land? And how does it differ from the first?

Deeper into Torah

Say the sages, the first warning refers to the temptation of being intoxicated by natural goodness, of failing to enjoy blessings in moderation, of allowing instinct to override self-control. Worse still, it is allowing one’s enthusiasm to lead to the wrong god, e.g., the pagan gods of fertility, rather than the true Creator God.

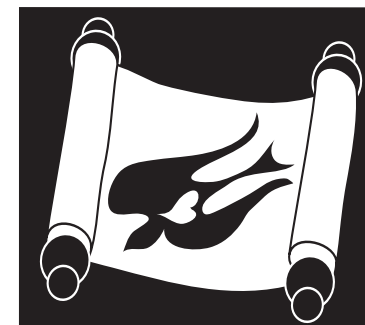
The warning in the second passage refers to the temptation of being overly confident in one’s abilities, of thinking that ‘my power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth’ (8:17) and forgetting that all blessings ultimately depend on the mighty hand of God.

Both temptations refer to complacency, to taking for granted God’s gifts, a blindness to God’s miraculous hand at work. Nachmanides (13th C. Talmudic scholar) comments how in the desert the Israelites depended on God’s miraculous gifts (e.g., manna) for their survival, and that recollection of these events should serve to remind us that it is the same God, with the same miraculous powers, who continues to provide for our needs, even if now the miracles in our own lives seem ‘ordinary’ or hidden.

Doing Torah

A blessing from God is no guarantee that fidelity to God will follow. In any given situation, fidelity involves a conscious, free choice.

Describe a time when (a) you were confronted by one of the two temptations mentioned above; and (b) you made a conscious choice for God.



Faith & Life

“I drove into my driveway, saw the broken window and my heart sank. I called the police, then my husband. We entered to find our home ransacked. The thieves had been through everything. Even our dirty washing. All I could say was ‘Why us? We are not rich.’

“Later that night we sat down and counted our blessings. They could have done more damage. Our pet was not harmed. We are together and we are okay. At first I was tempted to react in a ‘poor me’ victim mode, but as we talked things through we said to each other: we take for granted so many of our daily blessings - like having a home at all. Although I wouldn’t wish it on anyone, in some ways the break-in was a reminder of how fortunate we are, how blessed we are by God.”