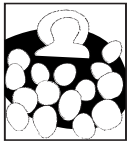


5 Blessings of being 'chosen'

Can you name five things you love about being part of a people 'chosen' by God? Being 'chosen' doesn't mean being 'better,' it means being treasured by another. That's how love works. A husband who loves his wife above all other women isn't pronouncing her a 'better' woman, but simply that she's 'his' woman. Such is the mystery of love, divine and human.



Belonging. By faith we have people to whom we belong. Whatever the problems in our communities, at least we have them! To belong is our deepest human need. God knows this, and *calls us to be a people*.



Purpose. Whatever the struggles in our daily toil, at least we have a purpose worth striving for! We are happiest when we are contributing. God knows this, and calls us to mission and service.



Forgiveness. No matter what we've done, or where we've been, our God reaches out to us with a healing embrace that can make us whole again.



Goodness. In faith we know that we are created fundamentally good in the divine image. What marvelous knowledge! God knows this, but do we really believe it?



Wonder. Christ became human so that we might become divine, said the Fathers of the Church. God doesn't just 'meet' our needs, God fulfils them beyond our wildest dreams, even making it possible to share in the divine life.



Why reflect on Torah?

"Indeed, the Church draws its sustenance from the root of that good olive tree, the people of Israel, onto which have been grafted the wild olive branches of the Gentiles. From the earliest days of Christianity, our identity and every aspect of our life and worship have been intimately bound up with the ancient religion of our fathers in faith."

— Benedict XVI 12.2.09 Rome

When Pope Benedict made this statement he was drawing on key ideas expressed in scripture and at Vatican II in its groundbreaking document *Nostra Aetate* concerning the Church's relationship with the Jewish people.

How can we understand ourselves as a Christian people, without appreciating the people from whom we came, whose heroic fidelity over the centuries brought forth the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament), who brought forth Jesus himself, who gave us Mary, the apostles and early disciples, indeed the Christian church itself, which was so beautifully 'Jewish' at the time of its birth.

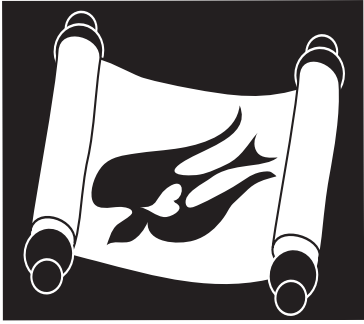
For all these reasons, we turn as Christians to the study of Torah. In its specific definition, Torah refers to the first five and foundational books of the bible; that part of Scripture so precious to Jews and Christians alike. How fitting that, at the Church's urging, we learn to appreciate Torah with the help of Jewish insights and methods of biblical appreciation. To this end, **Light of Torah** leaflets are a practical tool for use in homes and parishes.

In the Light of Torah

Ancient texts
through fresh eyes,
alive for today.

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 11:26-16:17

At first glance, today's Torah portion may seem like a formidable list of laws and instructions, perhaps oppressive, even violent, in parts (e.g., the death penalty for idolatry in 13:1-19). This is Moses' last chance to impress upon the Israelites their responsibilities as the chosen people of God before entering the Promised Land. They have a choice: listen to God's teachings and be blessed, or turn away from God and be cursed (11:26).

Sources: ACBC, *In Their Own Words* (Sydney, 2000); Eskenazi & Weiss, *A Woman's Torah Commentary* (NY, 2008); Friedman, *Commentary on the Torah* (San Francisco, 2003). Scripture quotations: *New JPS*.

Tasting Torah

"Together with your households, you shall feast there before the Lord your God, happy in all the undertakings in which the Lord your God has blessed you" (12:7).

"And you shall feast there, in the presence of THE Lord your God, and rejoice with your household" (14:26).

"You shall hold a festival for the Lord your God...for the Lord your God will bless all your crops and all your undertakings, and you shall have nothing but joy" (16:15).

Did you notice these passages in today's portion? Did they strike you? In the context of the whole text, what insights do they raise for you?

Touching Torah

Being in a covenantal relationship with God is not all hard work. Yes, our God has high expectations and isn't afraid to make demands of his people. But some of those demands are downright delightful! The verses quoted above are commandments to gather the family for a joyous feast. How often do we think of loyalty to God as a call to party?! Elsewhere, in the context of ritual prescriptions, the Israelites are commanded to "eat to your heart's content" (12:21), to "spend the money on anything you want—cattle, sheep, wine or other intoxicant, or anything you may desire" (14:26), and to hold annual festivals (16:1-17) while God ensures them secure dwellings (12:10), enlargement of their territory (12:20), and countless blessings.

Deeper into Torah

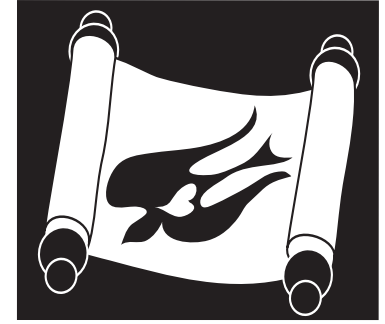
"For you are a people consecrated to the Lord your God; the Lord your God chose you from among all other peoples on earth to be His treasured people" (14:2). God asks much of his people, but only because his people are treasured beyond belief, chosen with divine passion from among all peoples; and because such demands bring about a just world where the stranger, the orphan and the widow find safety (cf. 16:11).

Our Torah portion invites us to dwell on God's abundant blessings. Yes, the consequences of rejecting God are dire, but the blessings of cleaving to God are extraordinarily lifegiving. We are tempted to disbelieve this, for life is difficult, sometimes brutal. Bad things happen to good people; evil appears to prevail. Even religion can be experienced as a weapon of oppression, or reduced to loveless 'duty.' Yet another testimony prevails through generations of those who live by God's Word: God's blessings are real. They can be celebrated with smiles and laughter, music and dancing, feasting and lovemaking, prayer and passion. Thus Judaism speaks of 'Simchat Torah', 'the joy of Torah,' and Christianity speaks of the 'Gospel,' 'good news.'

Doing Torah

Healthy religion includes joy. Discuss.

Happy the people the Lord has chosen to be his own (Psalm 33:1). Ponder this verse throughout your day. What is it like to feel 'chosen'?



Faith & Life

In response to an invitation to share something about her family life, a woman wrote:

"My husband left us when my daughter, 5, was diagnosed with leukaemia. My daughter's cancer is now in remission and, although life is busy, I am blessed. I have spent two years as a team member in a church ministry, so have moved on with wonderful support. I am very proud of what my children and I have achieved."

Talking point: how is it possible to feel blessed by God when life is so difficult?