



THE CALL TO PRAYER

1. The Patriarchs and Moses

Texts from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

In the Old Testament, the revelation of prayer comes between the fall and the restoration of man, that is, between God's sorrowful call to his first children: "Where are you? ... What is this that you have done?" (Gen 3:9,13) and the response of God's only Son on coming into the world: "Lo, I have come to do your will, O God" (Heb 10:5-7). Prayer is bound up with human history, for it is the relationship with God in historical events. (2568)

THE FIRST REVELATION OF PRAYER – ENOSH, NOAH

"Walking with God"

Prayer is lived in the first place beginning with the realities of *creation*. The first nine chapters of Genesis describe this relationship with God as an offering of the first-born of Abel's flock, as the invocation of the divine name at the time of Enosh, and as "walking with God" (Cf. Gen 4:4, 26; 5:24).

Noah's offering is pleasing to God, who blesses him and through him all creation, because his heart was upright and undivided; Noah, like Enoch before him, "walks with God." (Gen 6:9; 8:20-9:1) This kind of prayer is lived by many righteous people in all religions.

In his indefectible covenant with every living creature, (Gen 9:8-16) God has always called people to prayer. But it is above all beginning with our father Abraham that prayer is revealed in the Old Testament. (2569)

THE PRAYER OF ABRAHAM



God's promise and the prayer of faith

When God calls him, Abraham goes forth "as the Lord had told him" (Gen 12:4); Abraham's heart is entirely submissive to the Word and so he obeys. Such attentiveness of the heart, whose decisions are made according to God's will, is essential to prayer, while the words used count only in relation to it. Abraham's prayer is expressed first by deeds: a man of silence, he constructs an altar to the Lord at each stage of his journey. Only later does Abraham's first prayer in words appear: a veiled complaint reminding God of his promises which seem unfulfilled. (Cf. Gen 15:2f) Thus one aspect of the drama of prayer appears from the beginning: the test of faith in the fidelity of God. (2570)

Abraham's compassion

Because Abraham believed in God and walked in his presence and in covenant with him, the patriarch is ready to welcome a mysterious Guest into his tent. Abraham's remarkable hospitality at Mamre foreshadows the annunciation of the true Son of the promise. After that, once God had confided his plan, Abraham's heart is attuned to his Lord's compassion for men and he dares to intercede for them with bold confidence. (Cf. Gen 18:16-33) (2571)

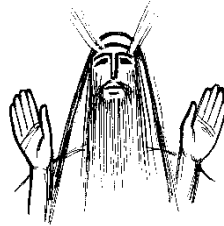
Abraham's sacrifice of his son

As a final stage in the purification of his faith, Abraham, "who had received the promises" (Heb 11:17), is asked to sacrifice the son God had given him. Abraham's faith does not weaken ("God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering"), for he "considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead." (Gen 22:8; Heb 11:19) And so the father of believers is conformed to the likeness of the Father who will not spare his own Son but will deliver him up for us all. (Rom 8:32) Prayer restores man to God's likeness and enables him to share in the power of God's love that saves the multitude. (Cf. Rom 8:16-21) (2572)

Jacob wrestles with God

God renews his promise to Jacob, the ancestor of the twelve tribes of Israel. (Cf. Gen 28:10-22) Before confronting his elder brother Esau, Jacob wrestles all night with a mysterious figure who refuses to reveal his name, but he blesses him before leaving him at dawn. From this account, the spiritual tradition of the Church has retained the symbol of prayer as a battle of faith and as the triumph of perseverance. (Cf. Gen 32:24-30; Lk 18:1-8.) (2573)

THE PRAYER OF MOSES



Moses and the prayer of the mediator

Once the promise begins to be fulfilled (Passover, the Exodus, the gift of the Law and the ratification of the covenant), the prayer of Moses becomes the most striking example of intercessory prayer, which will be fulfilled in “the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (Tim 2:5). (2574)

God's initiative in prayer

Here again the initiative is God's. From the midst of the burning bush he calls Moses. (Ex 3:1-10) This event will remain one of the primordial images of prayer in the spiritual tradition of Jews and Christians alike. When “the God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob” calls Moses to be his servant, it is because he is the living God who wants men to live. God reveals himself in order to save them, though he does not do this alone or despite them: he calls Moses to be his messenger, an associate in his compassion, his work of salvation. There is something of a divine plea in this mission, and only after long debate does Moses attune his own will to that of the Saviour God. But in the dialogue in which God confides in him, Moses also learns how to pray: he balks, makes excuses, above all questions: and it is in response to his question that the Lord confides his ineffable name, which will be revealed through his mighty deeds. (2575)

Contemplative prayer – the friendship of God

“Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend” (Ex 33:11). Moses' prayer is characteristic of contemplative prayer by which God's servant remains faithful to his mission. Moses converses with God often and at length, climbing the mountain to hear and entreat him and coming down to the people to repeat the words of his God for their guidance. Moses “is entrusted with all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly, not in riddles”, for “Moses was very humble, more so than anyone else on the face of the earth” (Num 12:3, 7-8). (2576)

Intercessory prayer

From this intimacy with the faithful God, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love (Cf. Ex 34:6), Moses drew strength and determination for his intercession. He does not pray for himself but for the people whom God made his own. Moses already intercedes for them during the battle with the Amalekites and prays to obtain healing for Miriam. (Cf. Ex 17:8-12; Num 12:13-14) But it is chiefly after their apostasy that Moses “stands in the breach” before God in order to save the people (Ps. 106:23; cf. Ex 32:1-34:9). The arguments of his prayer - for intercession is also a mysterious battle - will inspire the boldness of the great intercessors among the Jewish people and in the Church: God is love; he is therefore righteous and faithful; he cannot contradict himself; he must remember his marvellous deeds, since his glory is at stake, and he cannot forsake this people that bears his name. (2577)

IN BRIEF

- **God tirelessly calls each person to this mysterious encounter with Himself. Prayer unfolds throughout the whole history of salvation as a reciprocal call between God and man. (2591)**
- **The prayer of Abraham and Jacob is presented as a battle of faith marked by trust in God's faithfulness and by certitude in the victory promised to perseverance. (2592)**
- **The prayer of Moses responds to the living God's initiative for the salvation of his people. It foreshadows the prayer of intercession of the unique mediator, Christ Jesus. (2593)**