



## **THE CALL TO PRAYER**

### ***2. David, the Prophets, and the Psalms***

#### **Texts from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church***

#### **THE PRAYER OF DAVID, KING AND SHEPHERD**

*“Speak, Lord for your servant is listening”*

The prayer of the People of God flourishes in the shadow of God's dwelling place, first the ark of the covenant and later the Temple. At first the leaders of the people - the shepherds and the prophets - teach them to pray. The infant Samuel must have learned from his mother Hannah how “to stand before the LORD” and from the priest Eli how to listen to his word: “Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening” (1 Sam 3:9-10; cf. 1:9-18). Later, he will also know the cost and consequence of intercession: “Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you; and I will instruct you in the good and the right way” (1 Sam 12:23). (2578)

*David prays for God's People and prays in their name*

David is *par excellence* the king “after God's own heart”, the shepherd who prays for his people and prays in their name. His submission to the will of God, his praise and his repentance, will be a model for the prayer of the people. His prayer, the prayer of God's Anointed, is a faithful adherence to the divine promise and expresses a loving and joyful trust in God, the only King and Lord. (Cf. 2 Sam 7:18-29) In the Psalms David, inspired by the Holy Spirit, is the first prophet of Jewish and Christian prayer. The prayer of Christ, the true Messiah and Son of David, will reveal and fulfil the meaning of this prayer. (2579)

*The Temple – the house of prayer*

The Temple of Jerusalem, the house of prayer that David wanted to build, will be the work of his son, Solomon. The prayer at the dedication of the Temple relies on God's promise and covenant, on the active presence of his name among his People, recalling his mighty deeds at the Exodus. (1 Kings 8:10-61) The king lifts his hands toward heaven and begs the Lord, on his own behalf, on behalf of the entire people and of the generations yet to come, for the forgiveness of their sins and for their daily needs, so that the nations may know that He is the only God and that the heart of his people may belong wholly and entirely to him. (2580)

#### **ELIJAH, THE PROPHETS AND CONVERSION OF HEART**

*The mission of the prophets – to call for personal conversion*

For the People of God, the Temple was to be the place of their education in prayer: pilgrimages, feasts and sacrifices, the evening offering, the incense, and the bread of the Presence (“shewbread”) - all these signs of the holiness and glory of God Most High and Most Near were appeals to and ways of prayer. But ritualism often encouraged an excessively external worship. The people needed education in faith and conversion of heart; this was the mission of the prophets, both before and after the Exile. (2581)

*Elijah's prayer and its fruits*

After Elijah had learned mercy during his retreat at the Wadi Cherith, he teaches the widow of Zarephath to believe in The Word of God and confirms her faith by his urgent prayer: God brings the widow's child back to life. (Cf. 1 Kings 17:7-24)

The sacrifice on Mount Carmel is a decisive test for the faith of the People of God. In response to Elijah's plea, “Answer me, O LORD, answer me”, the Lord's fire consumes the holocaust, at the time of the evening oblation. The Eastern liturgies repeat Elijah's plea in the Eucharistic epiclesis.

Finally, taking the desert road that leads to the place where the living and true God reveals himself to his people, Elijah, like Moses before him, hides “in a cleft of the rock” until the mysterious presence of God has passed by. (Cf. 1 Kings 19:1-14) But only on the mountain of the Transfiguration will Moses and Elijah behold the unveiled face of him whom they sought; “the light of the knowledge of the glory of God [shines] in the face of Christ”, crucified and risen. (2 Cor 4:6; cf. Lk 9:30-35.) (2583)

*Prayer as attentiveness to the Word of God*

In their “one to one” encounters with God, the prophets draw light and strength for their mission. Their prayer is not flight from this unfaithful world, but rather attentiveness to the Word of God. At times their prayer is an argument or a complaint, but it is always an intercession that awaits and prepares for the intervention of the Saviour God, the Lord of history. (Cf. Am 7:2,5; Is 6:5,8,11; Jer 1:6; 15:15-18; 20:7-18) (2584)

## THE PSALMS – THE PRAYER OF GOD’S PEOPLE

### *The masterwork of prayer in the Old Testament*

From the time of David to the coming of the Messiah texts appearing in these sacred books show a deepening in prayer for oneself and in prayer for others. Thus the psalms were gradually collected into the five books of the Psalter (or "Praises"), the masterwork of prayer in the Old Testament. (2585)

### *Personal and communal prayer*

The Psalms both nourished and expressed the prayer of the People of God gathered during the great feasts at Jerusalem and each Sabbath in the synagogues. Their prayer is inseparably personal and communal; it concerns both those who are praying, and all men. The Psalms arose from the communities of the Holy Land and the Diaspora, but embrace all creation. Their prayer recalls the saving events of the past, yet extends into the future, even to the end of history; it commemorates the promises God has already kept, and awaits the Messiah who will fulfil them definitively. Prayed by Christ and fulfilled in him, the Psalms remain essential to the prayer of the Church. (2586)

### *Recalling saving events of the past and the future*

The Psalter is the book in which The Word of God becomes man's prayer. In other books of the Old Testament, "the words proclaim [God's] works and bring to light the mystery they contain". The words of the Psalmist, sung for God, both express and acclaim the Lord's saving works; the same Spirit inspires both God's work and man's response. Christ will unite the two. In him, the psalms continue to teach us how to pray. (2587)

### *Reflections of human experience before God*

The Psalter's many forms of prayer take shape both in the liturgy of the Temple and in the human heart. Whether hymns or prayers of lamentation or thanksgiving, whether individual or communal, whether royal chants, songs of pilgrimage or wisdom-meditations, the Psalms are a mirror of God's marvellous deeds in the history of his people, as well as reflections of the human experiences of the Psalmist. Though a given psalm may reflect an event of the past, it still possesses such direct simplicity that it can be prayed in truth by men of all times and conditions. (2588)

### *"Alleluia" – "Praise the Lord"*

Certain constant characteristics appear throughout the Psalms: simplicity and spontaneity of prayer; the desire for God himself through and with all that is good in his creation; the distraught situation of the believer who, in his preferential love for the Lord, is exposed to a host of enemies and temptations, but who waits upon what the faithful God will do, in the certitude of his love and in submission to his will. The prayer of the psalms is always sustained by praise; that is why the title of this collection as handed down to us is so fitting: "The Praises". Collected for the assembly's worship, the Psalter both sounds the call to prayer and sings the response to that call: Hallelu-Yah! ("Alleluia"), "Praise the Lord!"

"What is more pleasing than a psalm? David expresses it well: "Praise the Lord, for a psalm is good: let there be praise of our God with gladness and grace!" Yes, a psalm is a blessing on the lips of the people, praise of God, the assembly's homage, a general acclamation, a word that speaks for all, the voice of the Church, a confession of faith in song." (St. Ambrose) (2589)

## IN BRIEF

- **The prayer of the People of God flourished in the shadow of the dwelling place of God's presence on earth, the Ark of the Covenant and the Temple, under the guidance of their shepherds, especially King David, and of the prophets. (2594)**
- **The prophets summoned the people to conversion of heart and, while zealously seeking the face of God, like Elijah, they interceded for the people. (2595)**
- **The Psalms constitute the masterwork of prayer in the Old Testament. They present two inseparable qualities: the personal, and the communal. They extend to all dimensions of history, recalling God's promises already fulfilled, and looking for the coming of the Messiah. (2596)**
- **Prayed and fulfilled in Christ, the Psalms are an essential and permanent element of the prayer of the Church. They are suitable for men of every condition and time. (2597)**

