

BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS
AND PRAYERS FOR THE EIGHT DAYS
DAY 1

Children...Israel... my people do not understand

Reading Is 1: 2-3

Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth; for the Lord has spoken: “Children have I reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knows its owner, and the donkey its master’s crib, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand.

Meditation

The voice of the Lord break into the scene and the images of the ox and the donkey work as a parable. “The heavens and earth witness God’s complaint against his people, and the ox and the donkey dumbly rebuke Israel’s ingratitude.”²³ The text suggest a juxtaposition father/son vs. owner/ox, donkey; as stupidity and stubbornness are expected from the animals and trust and obedience are expected from the son. That’s Israel failure!

“Hear... Israel” There is an echo of the Shema Israel (Dt 6:4) and an echo of the Sinai covenant (Dt 32:1-43). Israel has been the focus of all their God's attentions, The Lord God, the Lord one has cared for them as a father cares for his children (2 Kgs 10: 6). But the care of the Lord did not give the expected result: Israel pays the benefits received from Yhwh with open rebellion, with a lack of submission that is an expression of the will to forget about the benefits received. Even the irrational animals themselves manifest a better way of acting. Such ingratitude consists in the fact that the people do not know how to recognize that the Lord, in addition to being their creator, is also the one who, through his providence, grants them the goods that allow them to live.²⁴

“God’s professing people did not know or consider that they owed their lives and comforts to God’s fatherly care and kindness. How many are very careless in the affairs of their souls! Not considering what we do know in religion, does us as much harm, as ignorance of what we should know.”²⁵

Prayer

As listening deepens, allow responses to arise spontaneously -mourn, praise, thanksgiving, questions, petitions...

Contemplation

Simply “be with” God’s presence. Be that son or daughter who recognize his or her Father.

Resolution

You may write your resolution...

DAY 2

Why will you continue to rebel?

Reading Is 1: 4-6

Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, offspring of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken the Lord, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are utterly estranged. Why will you still be struck down? Why will you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but bruises and sores and raw wounds; they are not pressed out or bound up or softened with oil.

Meditation

A new voice is introduced, (vv. 2-3 the Lord was speaking) a voice speaks for the Lord's sake. And even new adjectives come alive, their identity remains: children. But as children can be disciplined and even being chastised, which shows more the Lord's love for them than what they deserve for their evildoing (Cf. Heb 12:5-6).

This discipline and punishment, are presented as a fact, even already accomplished (Is 1:5). The question implies the uselessness of a punishment that has not served to correct. If something has been lacking, it is not the punishment itself; if there is no longer a healthy place that has not received blows, no part uninjured on which new blows could fall. And there has not been time for even healing such wounds. For this reason, after the question posed, it is what underlines the double parallel affirmation: nothing, including the head itself, has been saved, everything shows signs of disease; even the most intimate part of the person causes pain.²⁶ Israel has been punished by his own contumacy.

The new voice is used as a self-examination in order to return to the Holy One of Israel. So, v.5 can be prophesied as: "Why, O Israel, would you still be beaten, and where on your bruised body do you want the next blow?"²⁷ We can hear this question as the father's deep pain and suffering for the suffering of his own son. "While sin remains unrepented, nothing is done toward healing these wounds, and preventing fatal effects."²⁸ Human condition is revealed: "For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate." (Rm 7:15).

Prayer

Respond to the text and to God. Be aware of any feeling that can start arises...

Contemplation

Simply "be with" God's presence. Contemplate God's suffering and be his consolation!

Resolution

You may write your resolution...

DAY 3

The daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard

Reading Is 1: 7-9

Your country lies desolate; your cities are burned with fire; in your very presence foreigners devour your land; it is desolate, as overthrown by foreigners. And the daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard, like a lodge in a cucumber field, like a besieged city. If the Lord of hosts had not left us a few survivors, we should have been like Sodom, and become like Gomorrah.

Meditation

The image of a human body, filled with injuries, Israel (the son), becomes a city burned by fire and “the daughter of Zion is left like a booth in a vineyard.” (Is 1:8). Jerusalem was left unprotected like huts or sheds built up to guard ripening fruits. The vineyard after the harvest is abandoned. Her enemy had just played with her and collected her fruits.

“The terms ‘desolation’ and ‘pillars of fire’ describe well what could have happened when an enemy pass through, takes its inhabitants prisoner, destroys all the goods that serve them, and destroys as much as possible in its path.”²⁹ This is the condition of the daughter of Zion.

They are becoming like Sodom and Gomorrah, which means it is facing her destruction, not without Abraham’s intercession. (Cf. Gn 18:22-33). In the middle of this ruin and desolation, there is hope: “If the Lord of hosts had not left us a few survivors.” (Is 1:9). The remnant can be the seed of a new nation.³⁰

The foreigners, mentioned twice, portrait Israel’s idolatry. The problem is not sin as breaking a moral code but rather idolatry³¹ and the distortion of genuine humanity it produces. The result is always slavery and finally death.

Prayer

Respond to the text and to God. Can you name your idols and realize its empty promises?

Contemplation

Simply “be with” God’s presence. Contemplate your brokenness and hope for restoration!

Resolution

You may write your resolution...

DAY 4

What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices?

Reading Is 1: 10-11

Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.”

Meditation

If in the former text Israel became the daughter of Zion and was becoming Sodom and Gomorrah, here Israel has become already Sodom and Gomorrah. “The seriousness of [her] sin is underlined by comparing it to Sodom and Gomorrah.”³²

“Judea was desolate, and their cities burned. This awakened them to bring sacrifices and offerings, as if they would bribe God to remove the punishment, and give them leave to go on in their sin.”³³ But the Lord knows that there is neither repentance or reparation of their sin. They just try to escape from the situation, and this is not acceptable to God. As the passage is addressing their rulers, people and rules have become “Sodom-like offensiveness to God, and their ostentatious religious observances only aggravated the situation.”³⁴ The multitude of sacrifices implies an abundance of them well beyond the requirements (Cf. Mic 6:6-8).

If Israel has forgotten her vocation, she has also forgotten the purpose of the temple and its sacrifices. This place of worship (the temple) was made so people can sense God’s presence, confess their sins, and renew their covenant relationship --not to calm God’s anger, as with pagan idols. Israel’s worship has become heart-less celebration, an empty celebration, failing as a proper worship.³⁵

Prayer

Respond to the text and to God. Can you realize where your relationship with God is leading?

Contemplation

“Be still, and know that I am God.” (Ps 46:10).

Resolution

You may write your resolution...

DAY 5

Bring no more vain offerings

Reading Is 1: 12-15

“When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations— I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.”

Meditation

The text begins, again, with God’s voice expressing his unwelcome to those who appear before his eyes. The word “trampling” suggests blasphemy and desecration.³⁶ The temple courts (v.12) felt the heavy tread of the worshiping throng, probably swollen at such times of national crisis. The Holy One cannot tolerate sin. Sin is very hateful to God. So, God will reject all their prayers. It means, “If we allow ourselves in secret sin, or forbidden indulgences; if we reject the salvation of Christ, our very prayers will become abomination.”³⁷

Israel has treated her God as an idol, for that reason God makes himself an idol to Israel. The idol could not open his eyes, so He would not open his eyes. The idol could not hear, so He would not hear the many prayers. But He is not an idol. God will close his eyes, He will not listen, and He will reject the offering.³⁸

“God does not condemn the practices of worship that he, himself, has instituted, only the false motivation that distorts them. He welcomes worship from those who repent of their sins and come to his house to glorify his name.”³⁹ God rejects vain rituals and sacrifices. Every ritual of worship must be the result of an ethical action and a contrite heart (Cf. Ps 51: 17).

More scandalous than Israel’s empty sacrifices is the blood on their hands, which means oppression of the poor linked with violence.⁴⁰ The Sabbath, the day that the Lord God rested (Cf. Gn 2: 3), is not anymore, a restful day.

Prayer

Ask God to show you what He wants you to take from it.

Contemplation

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. (Ps 51: 10-11).

Resolution

You may write your resolution...

DAY 6

Learn to do good; seek justice

Reading Is 1: 16-17

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

Meditation

Here is the climax of the text: God's complaint ends with an invitation to repentance and ethical action. Israel is invited to a ritual of purification, to a sort of baptism (Cf. Ps 51:7) which means, turning from evil. If it is true that God can make people clean, this exhortation implies human responsibility. "People are accountable, but the grace and power of fulfillment are God's alone."⁴¹ Israel, the sinner, needs to step back from God's presence and be reconciled with his brother, and then to come back with a clean heart (Cf. Mt 5:23-24). And when Israel will realize that he cannot clean himself, may cry to God, wash me, cleans me (Ps 51:2,7,10).⁴²

Israel is called to *learn to do good*. Amendment of life means to deal with God and his neighbor as an essential, nonnegotiable element of true repentance and reconciliation with God.⁴³ This learning process implies a teaching process: God implies his assistance in this invitation. God will teach Israel how to do good. "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you." (Ps 32:8-9). It seems like Isaiah brings the wisdom of David, the one who committed many mistakes and sins but his heart was after God's own, searching for Him in repentance.

As God's invitation talks about defend the fatherless, God is calling Israel to be imitate His mercy (Cf. Lk 6:36), to become what Israel meant to be: image of God (Cf. Gn 1: 27). "You shall not pervert the justice due to the sojourner or to the fatherless, or take a widow's garment in pledge." (Dt 24:17).

Prayer

Respond to the text and to God. "Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! (Ps 51:2)

Contemplation

Rest on this passage: "And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; and behold, a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased'" (Mt 3:16-17).

Resolution

You may write your resolution...

DAY 7

Come now, let us reason together

Reading Is 1: 18-20

“Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

Meditation

The redemption plan made manifest in Jesus Christ, in the fulness of time, is presented here. Let's take a closer look: although our Bible translates the verse “let us reason,” the Hebrew verb carries the sense in of a legal context (See Job 23:7).⁴⁴ Some bibles translate it as: “let us argue” or “let us prove.” If such is the case, it means that God is willing to lower himself to discuss the case with Israel. The mystery of his Incarnation shadows this text (Phil 2: 6-8) and portraits what He is going to ask: obedience.

The colors: scarlet, red, and crimson underline the blood of Is 1:15 “Your hands are full of blood.” This color will appear again in Jesus' passion: “And they stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him” (Mt 27:28). So Isaiah's prophecy became a reality “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.” (Is 53:4). It is the book of Revelation that finally shades light to this reality. The vision after opening the sixth seal is a great multitude from every nation, standing before the throne and the Lamb, clothed in white robes. And those robes are white because they are coming out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (Cf. Rev 6: 9-7: 14)! Israel will prove that it is stubborn and he will refuse this opportunity again and again. But the Love of God never gives up on him.

Prayer

Let us pray with Isaiah, acknowledging our sins: “Behold, you were angry, and we sinned; in our sins we have been a long time, and shall we be saved? We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. There is no one who calls upon your name, who rouses himself to take hold of you; for you have hidden your face from us, and have made us melt in the hand of our iniquities. But now, O Lord, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand. Be not so terribly angry, O Lord, and remember not iniquity forever. Behold, please look, we are all your people” (Is 64: 5b-9).

Contemplation

Contemplate this passage: Jer 18: 1-12

Resolution

You may write your resolution...

Day 8

Zion shall be redeemed by justice

Reading Is 1:26-28

And I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, the faithful city. Zion shall be redeemed by justice, and those in her who repent, by righteousness. But rebels and sinners shall be broken together, and those who forsake the Lord shall be consumed.

Meditation

Zion looks desolate, her cities are burned with fire, her ruler have become perverted as Sodom's and her people as Gomorrah's, the faithful city has become a whore (Cf. Is 1: 7. 10. 21). Hosea presented the relationships between the Lord and his people as if they were those that exist between spouses, in a marriage (Cf. Hos 2:4–25). But he also had to declare that the people were the unfaithful and adulterous wife.⁴⁵ The voice of the Lord opens this new chapter in Zion's life: "I will restore... you shall be called... Zion shall be redeemed..." The promise of restoration, redemption and the new name break into scene. Sin is the worst captivity, the worst slavery. Zion will be release from bondage. Zion will be bought again and she will belong to his owner: God. How much did Zion cost God? How much was her price: the same blood of Christ (Cf. 1Pe 1:18,19). Through this Holy sacrifice Zion will receive a new name: "My Delight Is in Her" not anymore neither Forsaken or Desolate (Cf. Is 62:4). "For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your sons marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you" (Is 62: 5).

Like Sodom and Gomorrah, "the wicked are destroyed and the righteous people become a remnant to continue the unbreakable covenant between God and His people."⁴⁶ This conclusion brings to mind Mathew's final judgment when the Son of Man will separate people as a shepherd, the sheep on his right and the goats on the left (Cf. Mt 25: 31-34).

Prayer

"Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord! O Lord, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy! If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared" (Ps 130:1-4).

Contemplation

Rest in this passage: "And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord" (Ho 2: 19-20).

Resolution

You may write your resolution...