

## **“THE SACRIFICE FLOWER”**

*Sr. Jose Hobday, author of the short story titled. “The Sacrifice Flower” writes that “My mother, who was a Native American, taught me all kinds of wonderful ways to pray when I was a child. A very special one was the Sacrifice Prayer, which she adapted from the heritage of her people, the Seneca Iroquois. She taught me to say this prayer when I was feeling low or had a burden I wanted lifted. Later, I learned to use it for happy occasions and when I had a special request I wanted to make of God.*

*Like all mothers, she could always tell when something was bothering me. She’d say to me, “All right, Jo. I think it’s time you went outside and found yourself a Sacrifice Flower.*

***It’s time you get your burden lifted from your heart and give it to God.”...”***

*“So, I would go looking for a flower. That flower was supposed to be special, one that meant a lot to me. As a girl, I liked dandelions, hollyhocks, and daisies. So, I usually picked one of them...When I got home, I...told the flower what burden I wanted lifted and taken to God...as life went out of the flower, [since it was not to be placed in water], it would carry my prayer to God.”*

Around the year 587 BCE, the fall of Jerusalem occurred, and a portion of the Israelite population was held captured in Babylon. This banishment from their homeland was the punishment of an angry God. This sentence was necessary because the Jewish people provoked the Lord by their idolatry.

And now the captives were being consoled that they would again be gathered and returned to Jerusalem. By the word of the Holy One, the banished people would see God’s Justice, Peace and Glory. In preparation of these good signs from God, the Israelites were told to remove their burdens of mourning and misery, from their hearts.

In today’s Gospel reading, Saint Luke informs us that the oppressed Israelites, who were under the rule of the ruthless Romans, and self righteous Pharisees and scribes, were also looking for good signs from God. By the word of God, these oppressed people would soon see God’s salvation. And in preparation of this wonderful event, The People of God were told to remove all burdens from their hearts. This encouragement was

given by Saint John the Baptist, when he began to proclaim a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Would God be receptive to taking upon himself, the burdens of all of his chosen ones? Just like the time of Moses and the time of Baruch, the Jewish people were a holy nation. God had severed them from other nations so that they might be his; it was they whom God had specially known. The Jewish people were different from all nations, for they had a special place in the purpose of God.

We know that the answer is, of course God would be receptive to taking upon himself the burdens of his holy nation. And we hear in scriptural readings that he goes beyond being just receptive.

From Baruch, “God has commanded that every lofty mountain be made low. And that the age-old depths and gorges, be filled to level ground...” And from Luke, “Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The winding roads shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth.”

**In other words, God removed all obstacles in front of them, in order to help them to give up their burdens to him.**

With today’s Mass, we begin our second week of Advent, our season of anticipation and hope. It is a season of renewed eagerness for the arrival of Jesus into our hearts, our minds, our souls and our actions, while we still journey on this earth. We hope to receive the grace of God that can only come through his Son.

It is also a season of renewed eagerness for the second coming of our Lord.

With the birth of Jesus into our world, and through our Baptism into his Mystical Body, we were invited into his nation of holy ones. However, we are constantly burdened by our failures to keep our end of the agreement.

Throughout our history, as evidenced by the Israelites in Egypt, in Babylon and in Jerusalem, we yearn for deliverance from these failures. We hope ‘anew’ for the “Day of the Lord,” when we will experience the peace, truth, justice and righteousness that can only be found in God’s arrival.

Sr. Jose would continue: “...Every time I saw the flower, I could see it giving its life for me, and I could imagine my prayer being carried to God. That was true even when I was elsewhere and was just thinking about the flower. Either way, I had a strong sense my prayer was being heard.

*My flower and I were in union...When the flower finally died, I would take it outside, say good-bye to it, and thank it for giving its life for me and for delivering my prayer.”*

*“Then I would bury it so it would have a chance at new life, and I always hoped it would come back as an even nicer flower. In this simple, graphic way my mother taught me about life, too – how basic both dying and rising to living, and how important it is that we become Sacrifice Flowers for each other.”*

Saint Paul’s letter to the Philippians, today’s second reading was instructional to the Christian community at Philippi. The letter conveyed encouragements for unity and humility, growth and joy, and peace and love in their life together. Paul’s insight, into this desired life, reflects the words of Psalm 133: **“Behold how good a thing it is, And how becoming well, Together such as brethren are, In unity to dwell!”** [Ps. 133:1].

This letter, this “Epistle of Joy,” reflected Paul’s rejoicing of the faith, which his church in Philippi had shown. Paul’s converts were living the life that was marked by such desirable characteristics as Christian joy, sacrifice, partnership with God and each other and love of all.

You know, as I look around our Church, today, I believe that Paul’s “Letter of Joy” could easily be applied to us. Our lives have become more Christ-centered, not only during this Advent period of great anticipation and hope, but in our daily enthusiastic expressions of our faith and our daily sufferings for Christ and for the fellowship of our neighbor.

Our Christian lives have prepared us to become more sensitive to the mind and the heart of others, and specifically, we have become more sensitive to the will and desires of Jesus for us. Our Christian lives have prepared us to try to avoid what is evil and to desire what is right. It appears that we have learned how not to cause others to stumble. Our unified and ultimate goal is to live this Christian Life, so that glory and praise are given to God.

But in case you do not agree with my assessment, Advent is a time of

preparation that is marked by prayers of humble devotion and commitment, prayers of submission, prayers for deliverance, and prayers for those walking in darkness and who are awaiting and anticipating a great light.

Using his own words, from today's second reading; **Paul, "...praying always with joy in my every prayer for all of you..." had become a "Sacrifice Flower" for his church.**

**And like Paul, we can also pray always with joy for each other. What a lovely garden of "Sacrifice Flowers" we can be. God bless our lovely garden, while we wait with great anticipation and hope for Jesus, our Master Gardener to arrive.**