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# Privileges of Jews and Christians

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## **Privileges of Jews and Christians**

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## **Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time**

Sunday Readings for August 10, 2014 for Cycle A:

Is 55:1-3; Ps 145; Rom 8:35, 37-39; Mt 14:13-21

### **PRIVILEGES OF JEWS AND CHRISTIANS**

*Lawrence E. Frizzell*

Every facet of human life must be evaluated in the light of our relationship with God. The ancient Hebrews defined that fundamental relationship as a covenant, an intimate bond linking the individual to God and a human community. The proper response to this divine gift was - and is - measured by obedience to the commandments, the expression of God's will for his creatures.

After Elijah's life had been threatened because of his vigorous fidelity to the commandments, the prophet was inspired by God to make a pilgrimage to Mount Horeb (Sinai), where the covenant that made Israel a nation was initiated with the manifestation of God's presence.

What are the prerogatives of those who responded to the call of God? St. Paul lists the privileges of the chosen people. "They are Israelites; theirs is the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the Law (Torah), the worship and the promises; theirs are the patriarchs, and from them according to the flesh is the Christ (Messiah)" (Rom 9:4-5). We shall take a brief look at these privileges.

Israel was the name given to the patriarch Jacob after he wrestled with God (Gn 32:23-31); probably it means "one who struggles with God." This became the general designation for the twelve tribes that descended from Jacob and his wives. Three tribes (Judah, Benjamin and Levi) survived into the Second Temple period, yet hope for restoration of all twelve tribes prevailed among the people. Thus, Jesus chose twelve from among his disciples to be the foundations of the community he founded. He wanted to stress the continuity of the Father's plan, rooted in the call of Abraham and Sarah.

Through the covenant, Israel was initiated into intimacy with God that may be described as filial bond. "I have called my son out of Egypt" (Hos 11:1; see Ex 4:22-23). Adopted into God's family, Israelites should recognize the divine presence in their midst. The title "glory" designates the impressive presence of God that demands acknowledgment (the act of "giving glory" to God). The covenant gift began with Abraham, Sarah and their family and gradually Israel developed from clan to twelve tribes, becoming a nation at Mount Sinai. Later priestly and royal covenants were means whereby continuity of leadership at the service of God's people would be assured.

Every privilege has a concomitant responsibility. The gift of God's instruction (Torah) enabled the people to understand the dimensions of their creaturely and filial response. During the First Temple period the tables of the Decalogue were kept in the Ark of the Covenant; an examination of conscience prepared the community for worthy worship (see Ps 15 and 24). Frequently priests and prophets reminded them that fidelity to the covenant in the details of social exchange was essential to true worship.

While demanding a total response to the Torah, God assured his people of help so that the divine plan would be fulfilled. Under the guidance of the Anointed One, Son of David, all humanity would be blessed through the name of Abraham. When Jesus chose the twelve as apostles (disciples sent forth in his name, under his authority), he pointed to the coming of his Father's kingdom. Like Peter walking on the water, they had to learn that, as Emmanuel, Jesus was always with them. In faith and humility their life and witness would bring another dimension to Israel's call to be a light to the nations (see Is 42:6; 49:6).