

Office for prayer in connection with the Jewish people

Thursday, June 06 2024

Shavuot and Pentecost: A Christian festival at the heart of a Jewish festival

As the text of the Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament makes very clear, the gift of the Holy Spirit takes place on the Jewish day of Pentecost (Shavuot).

Chapter 2, verses 1 to 13 of the Acts of the Apostles: ‘And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing gale, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them separate tongues, as of fire, and there rested [one] on each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Holy Spirit gave them utterance’.

In Jewish tradition, the festival of Shavuot celebrates the giving of the Torah (the first five books of the Old Testament), fifty days after Passover (Pesach'), the celebration of the liberation from Egypt.

The events of the New Testament that were to become Christian festivals were therefore part of the Jewish festivals:

- The death and resurrection of Jesus took place at the time of the Jewish Passover (Pesach').
- The gift of the Holy Spirit, which gave rise to the feast of Pentecost, took place on Shavuot.

With Shavuot, the Jews commemorate the giving of the tablets of the law on Mount Sinai after the physical liberation from slavery in Egypt. This Jewish festival helps us to see what happens when the disciples receive the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem:

- Just as the Hebrews were freed from Egypt, the disciples have been freed from the anguish of death by Christ's death and resurrection, which opens them up to eternal life.
- Just as the Hebrews received a law written on tablets of stone, the disciples receive an inner law, that of the Holy Spirit, which irrigates their lives so that they radiate this new hope to all people.

INTERCESSIONS

R. Amen, amen, blessed be the God of Israel!

Or another refrain.

1. Most loving Father, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, you who mourned the violence between Cain and Abel, we pray to you for peace in the Middle East, we pray to you for all the peoples who inhabit this land where you have chosen to join us in our humanity.
2. Most loving Father, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, you who made reconciliation possible between Joseph and his brothers, forgive us for all our contempt for your people Israel. (As a sign of penitence, we remain silent for a few moments). We ask you, Father, to make brotherhood grow between the Jewish people and the nations.
3. Most loving Father, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, you who brought Israel out of Egypt and set them free, give your joy to the Jewish people and keep them faithful to your Covenant.
4. Most loving Father, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, you who united the twelve tribes of Israel around the Torah, give peace to Jewish believers in Jesus.
5. Most loving Father, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, you who sent your Son Jesus to save us, rest your blessing on Christians of Jewish origin.
6. Most loving Father, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Father of Jesus Christ, you who gave your beloved Son so that all might be one, bring together in unity all the Christian Churches.

7. Most loving Father, God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, you who promised the Jewish people the coming of the Messiah, you who promised the Church the return of your son. We praise you and we say in the Holy Spirit: "Maranatha, come Lord".