

# 5 ways

## to give thanks for 'first-fruits'

Upon settling in a new land, blessed by God, the Israelites are reminded to make an offering of thanksgiving. Think of a 'new' area in your life which, when you stop to think about it, is filled with God's blessing. What deliberate gesture of yours could acknowledge that blessing?



### New home.

Share the joy! Offer a gesture of warm hospitality; e.g., a dinner invitation to someone who would really appreciate being included in your domestic space.



### First job.

Your first job (or a new job). Congratulations! What can you offer the God who sustains you? E.g., donate a portion of your first pay packet to a charity.



### New baby.

What gift of thanksgiving can you offer the Creator for this miracle of life? A gift of prayer? An offering up of sleepless nights? A love letter to your spouse?



### First signs of recovery.

Are you recovering from illness? From financial setback? Turning a corner after a turbulent period? How might you honor the Lord for the relief of this blessing?



### New beginnings.

It took courage and trust to step out into that new relationship (or: new course, project, family decision), but you did! As the 'first fruits' emerge, how will you thank God?



## Light of Torah

Ancient texts  
through fresh eyes,  
alive for today.

## Why reflect on Torah?

*For the Jewish people themselves, Catholics should have not only respect but also great fraternal love; for it is the teaching of both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures that the Jews are beloved of God who has called them with an irrevocable calling.*

(John Paul II, Sydney, 26 Nov 1986.

Address to Jewish Community Leaders)

“Great fraternal love,” said John Paul II. He didn't ask us to 'be nice' to Jews (although that is a given!), but rather to call them brothers, sisters. In other words, he recognized the deep spiritual bonds that reach back through a shared sacred history and make us 'family' in the eyes of the Lord.

In doing so, he was reiterating a groundbreaking corrective in Catholic attitudes to the Jewish people; a corrective that was voiced at Vatican II, namely: the Jews are still the chosen people of God. The coming of Jesus does not nullify their covenant with God which remains valid. God does not renege on divine promises!

In our times, Catholics are entering into a renewed relationship with the Jewish people. But there is still much effort required, and this is the reason for **Light of Torah**. Our leaflets encourage parishioners to read and reflect upon the Torah (the first five books of the bible), drawing on Jewish sources and traditions. In this way, we learn more about our brothers and sisters of the Abrahamic covenant, while enriching our Catholic faith.

The *Light of Torah* leaflet series for Catholic parishes encourages parishioners to be attentive to the gift of Torah as part of their sacred Scriptures, and to the gift of Judaism which gave us Jesus, the Living Torah. Text by Teresa Pirola. Illustrations by Francine Pirola. © The Story Source, 2010. Reproduction permitted for non-commercial church use. Further reading: [www.lightoftorah.net](http://www.lightoftorah.net); [www.batkol.info](http://www.batkol.info) and [www.etz-hayim.com](http://www.etz-hayim.com).





## Torah Portion

From the Jewish calendar of Torah readings:

### Deuteronomy 26:1—29:8

Moses, on the slopes of Moab in sight of the land of Canaan, prepares his people for their entry into the promised land. He gives them a ritual to be performed when they get there. After settling in the promised land, the Israelite is to engage in a ritual of thanksgiving. Taking some of the first-fruits of his agricultural produce he is to present it to the priest along with a verbal recitation that acknowledges the LORD who is the giver of all good things. This ancient symbolic action is packed with insights for our own lives today. Come with us as we explore Deut. 26:1-11.

Sources: Eskenazi & Weiss, *A Woman's Torah Commentary* (NY, 2008); Leibowitz, *Studies in Devarim* (NY, 1996). Scripture: *NRSV*.

## Tasting Torah

*"When you have come into the land that the LORD your God is giving you ... you shall take some of the first of all the fruit of the ground, which you harvest from the land ... and you shall put it in a basket and go to the place that the LORD your God will choose..."* (Deut. 26:1-2).

Read Deut. 26:1-11. Carefully note all the repetitions and points of interest. Can you imagine the action taking place? Ponder the meaning of this ritual. Describe what you 'see' in all its color. E.g.:

## Touching Torah

(i) The action starts in the private sphere (the Israelite's fields) and proceeds to a designated holy place. (ii) The ritual is limited but it expresses so much. There is no way we can reciprocate God's bounty, but we can perform a simple action symbolizing an awareness that the earth belongs to God. (iii) It involves farmer and priest. (iv) Events in the story of the Israelite people are recounted in some detail (vv.5-10). (v) It concludes with a feast, enjoying *"all the bounty that the LORD your God has given to you and to your house"* (26:11). (vi) .... What can you add to our observations?

The sages see this ritual as promoting humility before God, selflessness and service. It prevents one from becoming soft and complacent, a reminder that wealth is a gift to be used generously for the common good and the glory of God. This stance of gratitude to God and awareness of blessing is fundamental to Judaism.

## Depthing Torah

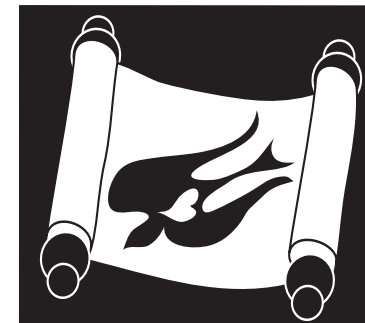
Examine the phrasing of the declaration in 26:3. *"I have come into the land that the Lord swore to our ancestors to give us."* In subsequent generations the Israelite farmer would repeat this ritual declaration. Note that he did not say: *"My ancestors came..."* but *"I have come..."*

For the Jews there is a precious relationship between past and present generations. Every Jew is to identify personally with his/her people, its history, and the great events by which God delivered Israel from slavery to freedom. What happened to 'them' (our ancestors long ago) happened to 'me.' Thus each Jew is obliged to remember with gratitude what God has done for him/her personally, and not to take for granted the blessings bestowed on their ancestors.

## Doing Torah

Thanks to Judaism, a similar mindset permeates our Catholic approach to the sacraments. Our sacraments celebrate not just 'past' events, but God's saving power touching us in the present. Indeed, every time we celebrate the Eucharist we are not simply recalling history; rather, we are 'right there' amidst the saving actions of Jesus, invited into an experience of transformation that is every bit as real as it was for his disciples.

- When you hear Scripture proclaimed, do you place yourself in the Story? Do you hear it speaking to you in the present?
- As Catholics, the Mass is our great prayer of thanksgiving. Do you approach it this way?



## Faith & Life

My colleague undergoes aggressive chemotherapy to treat advanced cancer. Even so, he counts every blessing along the way: an excellent doctor, an early medical appointment, a family member to drive him home from hospital, a friend's phone message... He looks forward with eagerness to the Eucharist, saying, "I have so much to thank God for..." His aura of gratitude is real and captivating, and a reminder of core truths.

How beautifully God-like is a person in the act of praise! That person is expressive of the divine image in which he/she was created. When I look back, I see that those who have most positively impacted my life have all been people with a deep capacity to bless and thank, to encourage and affirm, to offer prayers of praise and thanksgiving.