

A BIBLICAL REFLECTION **on being separated from regular worship**

During the Old Testament the Jewish people regularly met and prayed together in their local synagogues; however, the Temple in Jerusalem was at the very center of their worship of God. It was in the Temple that all the various prescribed sacrifices were offered to Him. To be separated from that Temple worship left a huge void in the lives of the People of God.

On several occasions the people were exiled from their land and the temple at Jerusalem was destroyed. They felt tremendous feeling of abandonment by their rulers, displacement from their homes and regular lifestyle, and lack of religious orientation in their lives during these times. For example, during the Babylonia Exile, the sentiment of the Jewish captives in Babylon is beautifully expressed in Psalm 137.

*"By the streams of Babylon
we sat and wept
when we remembered Zion.*

*On the aspens of that land
we hung up our harps,*

*Though there our captors asked of us
the lyrics of our songs
And our despoilers urged us to be joyous:
'Sing for us the songs of Zion!'*

*How could we sing a song of the Lord
in a foreign land?
If I forget you, Jerusalem,
may my right hand be forgotten!
may my tongue cleave to my palate
if I remember you not,
if I place not Jerusalem ahead of my joy.*

The Book of Daniel gives us a sense of the situation and how the people felt during these times of upheaval. It points out that, although worship cannot be carried out in the customary place and in the customary way, yet beautiful and meaningful worship can still very much take place. The PRAYER OF DANIEL is one of the most beautiful prayers in the Scriptures:

Book of Daniel 3:38-43:

"We have in our day no prince, prophet, or leader, no holocaust, sacrifice, oblation, or incense, no place to offer first fruits, to find favor with you.

But with contrite heart and humble spirit let us be received; as though it were holocausts of rams and bullocks or thousands of fat lambs.

So let our sacrifice be in your presence today, as we follow you unreservedly; for those who trust in you cannot be put to shame. And now we follow you with our whole heart, we respect you and pray to you. Deal with us in your kindness and great mercy. Deliver us by your wonders, and bring glory to your name, O Lord."

Someone once said: *"God, can write straight with the crooked lines of our lives...if we allow Him to do so."* The Covid-19 situation and the necessary response to combat it has turned our world upside-down. We are unable to publically assemble in worship and prayer, Our social gatherings and entertainment opportunities are very limited. Medical and other services have been greatly rationed. Surges in stockpiling food and other necessities have greatly diminished and curtailed our supply chain.

Yet, the situation is an opportunity for us to grow in our relationships with our families and others, to put the common good ahead of our own personal wants, to mature in our personal relationship and form of prayer life with God.