

EDITORIAL

Man is said to be a ritual animal, one who can bring heaven down to earth and raise earth to heaven by way of rites, rituals and celebrations. Basically every man is a priest, a *pontifex*, one who builds a bridge between heaven and earth. Festivals are the auspicious moments of his life in which this union of heaven and earth is experienced and celebrated. Festivals are usually understood as time to rejoice and celebrate, as an occasion for much fun and frolic. But along with the external pomp, processions and celebrations, there is also time for reflection, rethinking one's own religious tradition and giving concrete shape to its faith. Festival is thus a great gathering moment in one's life, a gathering of tradition, often from an immemorial point of history and also a social gathering of all the members who participate in that tradition.

Festivals give man a sense of transcendence from the temporal and spacial limitations of his being. Both time and space are very important with regard to festivals. Festivals are celebrated according to the days marked in the calendar, whether solar or lunar. A particular day is chosen as a day apt to commemorate the great original event, often a story of deliverance of the particular clan or nation which celebrates the festival. Most festivals are intimately related to certain space. The original event is supposed to take place in that particular place. This place has been considered holy and hence the meeting point of heaven and earth and consequently the place where all the descendants of the clan have to share from the same source of experience. Festivals are thus centred on sacred space and sacred time and become potent means to overcome the limitations of his temporality and earthboundness.

One peculiar phenomenon which we find very often attached to festival is a period of vigil and fast preceding their celebration of the feast. This is very significant because man, whenever he celebrates a religious festival, is called to renew himself and enter into the spiritual world with greater vigour and spiritual strength. One can not enter the realm of the divine without purifying himself of all his selfish inclinations and motivations. Hence fasting as a symbol of self-purification has become an inseparable part of festival celebrations. In spite of the secularization waves of our times interest in religious festivals is steadily on increase and many young members of our society take it

seriously, even giving themselves to severe fasting and other ritual obligations.

It is taking into consideration the revival of religion among our people that we have devoted this number to the study of religious festivals. We begin our investigations with a comparative study of the biblical festivals with the festivals of India. Participating to certain extent in a common oriental heritage these two families of festivals tend to be similar in many ways, although there is deep difference in matters of faith which forms the inner drive of every celebration. Father Lucius Nereparampil CMI makes this penetrating study and tells us that there is striking parallelism between these two families of religious festivals. Having taken this comparative look of the biblical and Indian festivals we now turn to Cuba in order to see how in reality a national festival is absorbed into a biblical festival. Raul J. Canizares presents us the people of Cuba celebrating their *Santeria*, baptizing it into a Christian Festival of Epiphany. This reminds us of the ancient Christian Rome where the festival of the temple of Pantheon on November 1 was transformed into the Christian festival of all saints. Instead of imitating the festivals of established Christian countries the Christian people in non-Christian nations should try to develop their own national and religious festivals into authentic Christian festivals. One can celebrate a festival meaningfully only when faith and cultural elements spontaneously merge into one celebration. If we study the genius of each festival in depth the possibilities of such an inculturation process becomes clearer and clearer.

From Cuba we turn to the African subcontinent to have a brief study of two important festivals in Nigeria. Dr. Emeka Onwurah gives us a description of a harvest festival in Nigeria known as "New Yam Festival". This is followed by Dr. Edwin A. Ahirika's article on "Egwu-Onicha" which is an African Festival of liberation. Once again your attention is called back to India to have a brief survey of two more Indian Festivals. Fr. Xavier Irudayaraj presents to us the details of a Tamil festival known as "Pongal" and is widely celebrated in South India, especially in Tamilnadu. "Kumbhamela" is another religious festival very solemnly celebrated in the North India and has recently gained the attention of many tourists from all over the world. Dr. M. Darrol Bryant gives us a real picture of this feast following its ritual day by day.

We hope that this study on festivals would awake interest in our readers to make further research on feasts, fasts and festivals.

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