

God's Covenant with Abraham Wednesday 11th November 2020

Today on our Old Testament journey we continue to walk with Abraham, our father in faith and reflect on the covenant God makes with him. Before we read Genesis chapter 15 let us begin by invoking the aid of the Holy Spirit.

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Come, O Holy Spirit,
and fill us with the gifts of knowledge and wisdom.
Strengthen us, we pray, with heavenly grace,
so that we may grasp with our minds,
treasure in our hearts,
and carry out in our deeds,
all the teachings of your Holy Book
which lead to salvation.
Amen.

As you can see from the pictures below most artistic depictions of this great patriarch show him to be of mature years. We saw last week that Abram was seventy five years old when God first called him and the writers of Genesis tells us repeatedly that Sara his wife was past the age of child bearing.



How then is it possible for God to keep his promise to Abram? The Lord said that from his servant many nations would be descended (Gn. 12:2), but surely for an elderly couple this is a biological impossibility?

Abram then attempts, in a feeble but good hearted way, to help God keep his promise by stating: *'...See, you have given me no descendants; some man of my household will be my heir.'* (Gn. 15:3). To put it more blatantly Abram is forming a backup plan so that God's impossible promise can be kept. He doesn't want God to loose face. The plan would see a younger man of Abram's tribe continue the family line and therefore the promised future generations would be realised. However, Abram's plan is futile because God always keeps his promises no matter how great the odds and impossibilities! The Lord needs no assistance from human beings.

*'...For my thoughts are not your thoughts,
my ways not your ways – it is the Lord who speaks.
Yes, the heavens are as high above the earth
as my ways are above your ways,
my thoughts above your thoughts.'* (Is. 55:8–9)

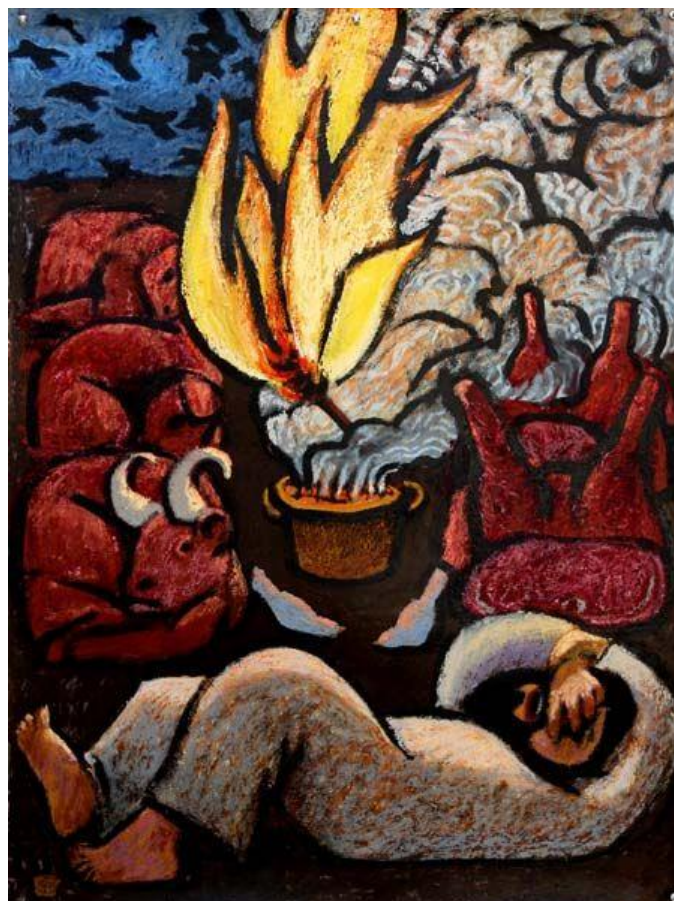


‘And then this word of the Lord was spoken to him, ‘He shall not be your heir; your heir shall be of your own flesh and blood.’

Then taking him outside he said, ‘Look up to heaven and count the stars if you can. Such will be your descendants’ he told him.’ (Gn. 15:4–5)

Abram’s response to God is to place his full trust in Him and surrender his total being to the Almighty. This action of faith, we are told in Genesis, justifies Abram in the sight of God (Gn 15:6).

Hopefully having read today’s chapter in Genesis the following picture makes a lot of sense and is not as gruesome as described in verse 10!



It is the covenant that God makes with Abram to show that He will keep his promise of making his servant’s descendants as many as the stars. What is a covenant? In the ancient Near East a covenant was a binding contract between two parties. It was ratified in a ceremony where animal carcasses were divided and the parties involved walked between the animal pieces. The sacrificed animals were a sign of a curse that would fall upon any party who broke the covenant agreement.

After Abram had prepared the covenant sacrifice he fell asleep only to become suddenly aware of the very presence of the Almighty Himself.

'When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, there appeared a smoking furnace and a firebrand that went between the halves. That day the Lord made a Covenant with Abram in these terms:

*'To your descendants I will give this land,
from the Wadi of Egypt to the Great River...''*

(Gn. 15:17-19)

God walks through the divided carcasses as a smoking firepot and a flaming torch and therefore binds Himself to Abram and his descendants in a unique way that has never happened before. Notice also that it is only God who passes between the sacrificed animals which reminds us that it is only He who has the strength to be the God of Abram and his descendants forever.

From Abram's response in faith to God's promise, that his descendants would be as many as the stars in the sky, here we are today! He we are today with the gift of faith that allows us to know God is near and never abandons us. How do we know this? Because he promised Abraham our father in faith.

God Bless and keep praying

Fr. O'Brien