

The Call of Abraham

Wednesday 21st October 2020

Dear Brothers and sisters,

As we approach the end of October, we still find ourselves adapting and learning to live with the Coronavirus. After having a small break from our biblical tour of the Old Testament I thought it seemed appropriate, especially at this time, to resume our journey again and get to know Abraham a little better.



At Mass when the priest prays the words of the Roman Canon there is a sentence that says '*...the sacrifice of Abraham, our father in faith...*' Today, as we continue our biblical journey, we reflect on who this Abraham our father in faith really is. Before we read Genesis chapter 12 let us ask for the help of God the Holy Spirit as we pray:

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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.

Abraham is honoured and revered as being the patriarch common to Christianity, Judaism and Islam. The title '*patriarch*' often appears in Old Testament texts and simply means the head of a family/tribe/clan. As you will have read in today's chapter when the God called Abram, (we'll look at the spelling difference between Abram and Abraham another time), he responded without question. He left everything, his home, his community, his country and led his family out into the unknown to follow God. Let's not forget that this God was completely new to Abraham, an unheard-of deity!

'So Abram went as the Lord told him, and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he left Haran.' (Gn 12:4)



This to me is faith! Abram left his homeland and the security it offered at seventy five years of age to follow God who he did not quite fully know! His 'yes' to God is not a hunch or a whim or a fleeting fancy but a whole hearted 'YES', a complete and total action of faith. Faith that is trusting, Faith that is yearning, Faith that is loving, Faith that says, ***'Only my relationship with you God really matters because in some unfathomable and mysterious way you make me complete.'*** This is partly why Abram is known as '*Our father in faith.*'

Up until now the book of Genesis has dealt with the theological truths of our fallen human nature. How through the disobedience of Adam and Eve Original Holiness dissolved into Original Sin. How the effects of this disease passed on to each successive generation showing it's hideous nature in jealousy, anger, murder, debauchery, pride etc. Now as we commence chapter 12 the poetry of Genesis begins to have a more concrete historical nature. Scott Hahn, an eminent Catholic biblical scholar writes:

'Gn 12:1 – 50:26 The patriarchal narratives. These are often classified as folk tales, legends, or epic sagas; some even consider them free creations of a later age. However, the stories of the Patriarchs are best regarded as genuine family history. Not only do the main characters and events have a solid claim to historicity, but a number of supporting details have been verified by modern research as well.'

(Hahn, Genesis: Commentary, Notes & Study Questions)



Abram lived in the period between 2000BC to 1500BC and came from Ur, one of the oldest cities in southern Mesopotamia. To put this in context, when Abram was called by God Stonehenge was just being completed and Britain was entering the Bronze Age. Our father in faith became a nomad who lived beyond the cities of the east and moved with his flocks following the changing of the seasons.

The nomadic life was precarious. Since the climate in the area where they lived was dry they had to travel over vast tracks of land to find good pastures for their flocks to graze on. They travelled in large groups for security reasons not only to keep safe their livestock from thieves and wild animals but also to protect themselves. Some lands welcomed them as they could use the manure left by the nomads animals to help fertilize and grow crops. Inhabitants in other regions were hostile when strangers arrived in their territory looking for water and pasture land. When Abram and his wife Sara (later on Sarah) left the great city of Ur to follow God they effectively took on the wandering nomadic life.

After seventy five years of being settled in one place they now lived a fragile and constant changing lifestyle.



Abram shows great faith, courage and conviction when he leaves the urban life of Ur to go out into the unknown to follow God. He is blessed for his actions and God promises him that his children will one day inherit the land he is now wandering through. Abram then builds an altar in honour of God:

'Abram passed through the land as far as Shechem's holy place, the Oak or Moreh. At that time the Canaanites were in the land. The Lord appeared to Abram and said, 'It is to your descendants that I will give this land.' So Abram built an altar for the Lord who had appeared to him' (Gn. 12:6-7)

In fact Abram builds other altars for the Lord God at different places along his wanderings. There is one at Bethel (Gn 12:8), one at Hebron (Gn13:18) and another on Mount Moriah (Gn 22). All these altars allow God's new servant to offer praise and worship for the many blessings he and his family have received from the Lord.

The ancient editors of Genesis reveal Abraham and his descendants to be models of what it is to live in God's blessing. The Almighty's blessings (88 in total can be found in Genesis 12 -50) are never earned or bought but are given as pure gifts. These gifts of God's blessing allow the people who receive them to live their fullest potential as holy people. A blessed person, like Abram, is promised both spiritual and material benefits to themselves and their family.



We saw at the beginning of Genesis, in the Creation narrative, that humanity was blessed by God in the goodness of the universe. However, with the Fall and the poison of sin, people corrupted the beauty of God's creation and used it for personal gain and selfishness rather than sharing its fruits. In Abram we see the model of what it means to truly appreciate and share God's blessings.

*'I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you and make your name so famous that it will be used as a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you:
I will curse those who slight you.
All the tribes of the earth shall bless themselves by you.'*
(Gn 12:2-3)

As we can see from the above quote, God's blessing is a gift not just solely for Abram but for others as well.

We now are called to share God's blessings with those around us. Throughout our lives we may have had many ups and downs but if we reflect carefully, we have also had many blessings. Blessings of family, friendships, love, forgiveness, mercy, hope, peace, realised dreams and ambitions, consolations and graces and most importantly - Faith! Abram, our father in faith, passed on his experience of God to his children who continued to share the knowledge of their father's relationship and blessed experiences of God to others. This handing down from Abram and his descendants still continues as here you are reading these poor words of mine!

So brothers and sisters let us meditate this week how we are going share God's blessings with those around us. Will we pray with our children before they go to bed? Will we reach out and forgive somebody who has hurt us just as Jesus forgives us? Will we offer a prayer for a stranger who is struggling? Will we have the courage to talk about and share our faith with those around us? How will you walk in the footsteps of Abram the nomad and share out God blessings with those around you?

God Bless and keep praying
Fr. O'Brien