

Second Sunday of Lent C: the adventure of faith
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My friends, Bishop Robert Barron has an interesting take on the readings this Sunday and it begins with a single word: faith. What is faith? Faith, at its most primordial level, is an attitude of trust. In the first reading we have Abraham. Abraham is called the Father of Faith. Why? When Abraham was 75 years old, God appeared to him in his homeland of Ur of the Chaldeans, “Get up, take your family and friends, and go on a dangerous desert trek to a land that I will show you.” Can you imagine? Abram is 75 years old and is being asked by God to go on a perilous journey to a land he has never seen. It makes you kind of wonder how many people God had to ask before he got a “yes” from somebody. You can just imagine God going house to house until he found someone who had the courage to live an adventurous life marked by faith. You see my friends, for Abraham, faith is at the most primordial level, an attitude of trust.

Does Abraham know where he is going? No
Does he have a map? No
Is he in control? No

But Abraham trusts. That is the basic meaning of faith. We also find out something else from this story, and from every other story in the bible, we have a God who is adventurous!

Contrast Abraham with Adam and Eve for a moment. Adam and Eve, at the moment of truth didn't trust God's word, they didn't want the adventure, no, instead they grasped for control by grasping the fruit of forbidden knowledge. They wanted to be in control of every aspect of their lives and they wanted to be in power. At the moment of truth, they didn't want to turn their lives over to an adventurous God.

Abraham reaches his moment of truth in today's first reading from Genesis. Because of Abram's faith, God promises him as many descendents as there are stars in the sky. God promises Abram that his descendents will occupy the land that will be shown to him. Abram then begins to falter and doubt, how can I know Lord that my descendents shall occupy this land, he asks. God answers Abraham by establishing a covenant with him. What is a covenant? It is a pact, a contract, an agreement, a deal, between God and human beings. Covenants are God's way of saying, “I will show you my fidelity.”

We then have this peculiar passage where Abram is asked to bring a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old she-goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon. Abram brought him all these, split most of them in two, and placed each half opposite the other. What is this about?

In the ancient world, this was how people would make an agreement with one another. They would split animals in two, place them on either side, and then meet each other in the middle of the divided animals to make a contract with each other. The split animals

were an ancient way of saying, “may this happen to us if we are not faithful to our word.” This can have Christological significance later on.

What happens next, it says Abram falls into a trance, he falls into a deep sleep, he is surrounded by darkness, he can therefore not see around him, he is asleep, and therefore defenseless. Abram falls into a state or an attitude of complete surrender, of complete trust to an adventurous God.

What does he see with the light of faith? Abraham sees a brazier and torch coming to meet him in the middle of the divided animals. The brazier and torch are objects that symbolize God’s divine presence. Furthermore, the torch especially emphasizes God’s luminosity in the darkness. God arrives into Abram’s presence to announce his fidelity and make his covenant.

Now, hold this picture in your mind as we now move to our Gospel reading of the Transfiguration. Jesus leads Peter, James and John up the mountain. Biblically minded people are aware that covenants with God typically occur on mountains in the bible. Jesus transfigures before them, his clothes and appearance change, and Jesus becomes luminous in their presence, not unlike the torch and brazier that we just encountered in Genesis. The brilliance of Jesus announces God’s fidelity, foreshadowing the words that would come momentarily from heaven, “this is my chosen Son listen to him.”

Moses and Elijah appear. The presence of Moses suggests that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law. The presence of Elijah suggests that Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophets. On another level, however, Moses and Elijah are also great biblical adventurers. Moses leads the Hebrews out of the bondage of slavery into a forty-year adventure in the desert to the promised land. Elijah, when he is at his wits end, trusts in the Lord to carry on even when he prayed for death. Elijah and Moses are adventurers who accepted God’s call to go on an odyssey of faith, even when they were at their wits end. Their presence was an encouragement to Jesus’ disciples, who were also called upon to a journey of faith.

What does the Gospel tell us next? It says Peter and the other disciples fell into a deep sleep. Sound familiar? Like Abram, the disciples fall into a trance. They surrender all control, they trust in God’s fidelity. For a little while, and then Peter responds to the theophany of the transfiguration in a very human and very spiritually dangerous manner. Peter says, let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." What is the problem with this? My friends, we are always in danger of being tempted, like Peter, to go back to Adam and Eve as if we are in control. Peter wants to contain Jesus, Moses and Elijah in a place with defined borders, in a place where we can control the sacred mysteries, control our religion, and control our relationship with God. Religion then becomes empty of mystery, absent of faith, and devoid of adventure. But God, throughout Sacred Scriptures, refuses to be controlled. God always calls upon his people to a life of adventure, a life of faith. My friends, faith is an attitude of trust. Faith doesn’t built tents to contain the uncontainable. Faith is a pilgrimage with an adventurous God.

Christians, we have entered into the desert with Jesus for forty days and forty nights. We have left our place of comfort and control to join Jesus in fasting and prayer. We have cast aside the drudgery of the mundane to embrace the adventure of faith. We do not know where our lives are going. We do not have a map or compass other than the light of faith; for God has made a new pact, a new contract, a new covenant with us. And this is what is so amazing!

On our part, we broke the covenant our Father Abraham sealed with the almighty God in the circle of sacrificed animals so many years ago. God, however, out of love for us bore our punishment and established a new covenant in the broken body and blood of his only Son our Lord. It is through this new covenant with the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world that we are offered the ultimate adventure of faith as we journey with Jesus through his passion, death and resurrection to the Promised Land He is leading us to the Promised Land of Heaven. Ultimately, this is where our Lenten journey is taking us: our Easter Hope. How we get there is through faith, an attitude of trust, and a sense of adventure.