

2nd Sunday of Lent, Year A

Fr. Samuel Springuel

5 February, 2023

1st Reading Genesis 12:1–4a

Responsorial Psalm Psalm 33:4–5,18–19,20,22

2nd Reading 2 Timothy 1:8b–10

Gospel Matthew 17:1–9

“Do you trust me?” The line, or some variation on it, is a popular trope in movies. So popular, in fact, I’m willing to bet all of you can remember hearing it at least once and that if we polled those of you who could actually remember the name of the movie they heard it in, we’d get at least half-a-dozen movies, possibly more, and you’d all be right. In my own experience, the line usually gets said before the speaker does something that is apparently stupid or dangerous in a way which would make any normal person, including the person they are talking to, balk at going along with them. Of course that stupid or dangerous thing is going to work, because after all, we’re talking movie logic here, but only if the characters involved cooperate.

“Do you trust me?” God doesn’t come out and say it directly to Abram, but one can practically hear it under the surface. God is asking Abram to take a risk, a big one, and leave the land where his father had settled. Moving, in that day and age, wasn’t easy. Travel, especially over long distances, took time, lots of time, so there wasn’t an opportunity to go scout things out, find a place to live, and then come back to retrieve one’s family and possessions. There were no moving services which would conveniently come to your home, help you box up and pack all your stuff, and then handle the shipping for you, so you only needed to worry about a few personal effects while making the journey yourself. Further, there was no banking system that would allow you to securely transfer wealth without having to actually transport anything more than some slip of identifying documentation. And on top of all this, Abram was probably just getting settled in the community of Haran after his father had already moved the family from Ur, over 600 miles away. And now God wanted Abram to do it all again and move another 400 plus miles to the land of Canaan. So really, “Do you trust me?”

“Trust” is defined as firm belief in the truth, ability, or reliability of someone. Answering “yes” to the question “do you trust me?” isn’t necessarily doing

anything extraordinary. It is possible to trust someone and still hold them at arm's length. One can trust in a narcissist to act in his own interest, without any consideration for others, even if that involves lying or breaking his word. It's also possible to trust in objects, as when we trust a seat belt to minimize our injuries in a car accident. Abram's trust is much more than this, however; it is extraordinary. To say that Abram trusted in the LORD, is to say that he believed that God spoke the truth when he made promises. It is to say that he believed that God could fulfill those promises, that he had the power, even in a land far away (no small feat in a time when gods' powers were thought to be tied to the land of their people). It is to say that Abram believed that God would be with him in his travels, would, in a manner of speaking, walk alongside him and see him through the hardships that moving his family over great distances would inevitably involve. Abram's trust wasn't just trust; it was faith.

The Catechism defines "faith" as the complete submission of one's intellect and will to God. The Letter to the Hebrews defines it as "the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." Both of these definitions are operable in Abram's response to God. Upon hearing God's instructions, Abram does as the Lord instructed, with neither questions nor delay. He will eventually point out that because he remains childless, God's promises of descendants and an inheritance for those descendants are in danger of going unfulfilled. But he only does this *after* he has followed God's direction for years, probably close to a full decade, without any sure sign of the fulfillment of God's promises. God's promise, his word, was enough for Abram at the beginning. No sign, no visible manifestation of the fulfillment of those promises, was necessary.

In this regard, Peter, James, and John are very unlike Abram. Though they do not ask for it, Jesus grants them a vision of his glory in the Transfiguration. They *are* given a sign, a preview of heaven, and hear the voice of the Lord speaking directly to them. In that moment, they have no need of faith, because the glory is no longer hoped for, but present before them; it is no longer unseen, but visible to their eyes. It is no wonder that they fell prostrate and were afraid. The world that they had known, the reality in which they lived, had been torn asunder.

Temporarily, at least. For when the vision ends, and "they saw no one else but Jesus alone," Peter, James, and John once again stood in the need of faith. While they had seen Christ's glory, it is no longer present before their eyes. Like Abram before them, they are now tasked with walking in God's way through trial and hardship with only the promise to go on. Indeed, in some sense their task is harder, for having been given a glimpse of the heavenly glory, they must now endure the trial of the Passion when that glimpse must have seemed like some cruel mockery.

Faith is at the same time both choice and gift. It is Abram's *choice* to trust in God's promises, even when he had no physical descendants in which they might be fulfilled. It is Peter, James, and John's *choice* to continue to follow Jesus, even as his teachings stir up more and more conflict with the authorities. But it is also God's *gift* to Abram that enables him to make that choice. It is Jesus's *gift* to his disciples that enables them to learn from his example and

teaching, to become recipients of the Holy Spirit who transform the world.

“Do you trust me?” God asks us that question everyday. Indeed, every moment of everyday that question is posed to us anew. “Do you trust me?” How do we answer? What do we choose? Are we willing to be like Abram, and walk in God’s ways with only a promise to guide us? Are we lucky enough to be like Peter, James, and John, given a glimpse of what is to come so as to sustain us through the trials we have yet to endure? Are we ready to receive God’s gift of faith in whatever form, on whatever timeframe, by whatever means God chooses to offer it to us? Will we choose the gift of faith and so truly say, “I believe...”