19th Sunday in O.T. 2022

The opening sentence of the second reading declares*, “Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for…”* But what is faith?A freer translation of the second reading puts it this way: *Faith is what gives assurance to our hopes; it is what gives us conviction about the things we can't see. It is what the men and woman of old were famous for.”* One of the old, famous for his faith, was Abraham, so much so, that he is referred to as “our father in faith”. The reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, tells us that *“It was by faith that Abraham obeyed the call to set out for a country....without knowing where he was going.”* Abraham was a searcher, he struggled with those questions which confront every human being: “Where have I come from? What am I doing? Where am I going?

But who was Abraham? He was part of a large migratory movement that brought people from around the Persian Gulf down into Palestine. He and his family were indistinguishable from the other migrants. Life for these migratory peoples was constantly threatened by unpredictable forces of nature, forces beyond their understanding and therefore regarded as supernatural. These they strove to placate so as to ensure harmony, but what they worshipped was in reality a projection of their desperate need for security. History shows us that, throughout the ages, humanity has expressed the quest for God in various ways. No matter how primitive, or confused these religious expressions were, always behind them lay the quest for the true God. St. Augustine rightly observed, “you have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

But, we see from the Bible, that there was something extraordinary about Abraham: he grew in the awareness of God as a personal presence that whispered in his heart. He listened to this voice, and discovered that the true God was not an uncaring capricious force of nature, but was full of compassion, and abounding in love *(cf Ps. 144)*. This belief became a lamp which guided Abraham's steps in the darkness all around him *(cf LF57).* In Abraham, we see a human being who, just like us, seeks the truth, desires to listen to God, to have faith in God's word, and does not grow weary of trusting in God.

But how can we come to know of God’s existence? We can examine those which are sometimes called the proofs for the existence of God. However, we must understand these “proofs” not as scientific proofs, since scientific proofs are not possible, but as “converging and convincing arguments” which lead us to a certainty about the truth of God's existence.  *(cf CCC 31)*

One such argument suggests that we can gain a knowledge of a Creator God from the world around us, because of its order, its beauty. and its wonder. St. Augustine asked, where does the beauty of the world come from, if not from the beautiful One. Scripture teaches that if we are charmed by the beauty of created things, know that *“the very Author of beauty has created them....and if (we) are impressed by their power and energy, let (us) deduce from these how much mightier is he that formed them, since through the grandeur and beauty of creatures we may, by analogy, contemplate their Author” (cf Wis.13:1-9).*

A second argument for the existence of God comes from a reflection on the source and origin of ourselves as persons. We humans are open to truth and beauty, we have a moral sense, recognising right and wrong, a conscience which urges us to do good and to avoid evil, a yearning for happiness, and a deep desire for the infinite. Such a reflection takes us in the direction of the Source of all goodness and beauty and perfection - it is towards this Source that the soul is constantly attracted, this reality we call God. *(cf CCC33-34)*

From the evidence deduced from creation, human reason can “attain certainty” about the truth of God's existence. While such evidence predisposes us to faith in God, *(cf CCC 42),* our knowledge of God would be limited if we relied on that alone. But just as God revealed himself to Abraham, so God reveals himself to us through the scriptures and in Jesus Christ *(cf CCC 35, 38,40).* Abraham, “our father in faith”, welcomed God's revelation, that voice that whispered in his heart. In the Mass as we listen to the scriptures being read, we need to be aware that we are not listening merely to good advice. It is God speaking to us – speaking to our hearts. The mystery of God is not a concept to be grasped mentally, rather it is first an invitation into a relationship, one which transforms our lives, and answers those basic human questions - “Where have I come from? What am I doing? Where am I going?”

*“May you be blessed, Lord God,*

*because you have created me,*

*and because the heart that you have given me*

*you held, first of all, in your hands!*

*And you live in my heart –*

*it is there that I know you!*

*Blest are you, O Lord.”* **Amen**