19th Sunday in O.T. 2025

Psychologists tell us, and personal experience confirms, that we all need people to look up to – some might call them “heroes”. The memory of our “heroes”, dead or alive, helps us to survive and thrive! The scripture of today’s Mass causes us to ask, “Who are my heroes and what do they represent?” We do so, acknowledging that those we admire, and wish to emulate, largely define our ideals, and help us to lift our eyes a little higher.

The world's three great monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, have this in common - they all look back to one man who lived almost four thousand years ago - Abraham. We encounter him in today’s second reading.

For Judaism, Abraham was the first Jew, to whom God made the promise that his descendants would be as many *“as the stars of heaven or the grains of sand on the seashore.”* For Islam, Abraham was a great prophet, the first to proclaim that God is one, and from whom, it is claimed, the Prophet Muhammed is descended. For Christians he is “our father in faith”, who put his trust in God's promise, who looked forward *“to a city founded, designed and built by God.”*  The Bible speaks of a man committed to walking the path which he believed God had marked out for him, saying, *“It was by faith that Abraham obeyed the call to set out for a country....without knowing where he was going.”* But where did he come from, and why do we refer to him as “our father in faith”? In other words, what is his relevance for us today?

Abraham was part of a large migratory movement that brought people from around the Persian Gulf down into Palestine. In the beginning, he and his family were indistinguishable from the other migrants - just another face in that migratory crowd which was constantly threatened by the unpredictable forces of nature, as well as by warfare and persecution. Migrants of that time endured the same insecurity and hostility that, sadly, many migrants endure today.

It was out of such difficult circumstances that Abraham emerged as a searcher after truth. He struggled with those questions which confront every human being: “Where have I come from? What am doing? Where am I going? Gradually, Abraham grew in the awareness of God's personal presence, and as he did so, he also grew in the conviction that God had chosen him. As he listened to this voice, he discovered that it spoke of love and of concern for him - so different from the harsh and capricious forces of nature that others around him, in their ignorance, regarded as gods. His faith in God, who spoke to him in the depths of his heart, became a lamp which guided his steps in the darkness all around *(cf LF57).* In Abraham, we meet a person, who like ourselves, seeks the truth, desires to live truthfully, listens and puts his faith in God's word, and does not grow weary of trusting in God.

William Shakespeare once claimed that “The course of true love never did run smooth” *(A Midsummer Night’s Dream, Act 1, Scene 1).* Is it not equally true to say that, the course of life never runs smoothly, nor as we expect? Often, it can be difficult to accept, as the Psalm puts it, *“He guides me along the right path; he is true to his name…even should I walk in the valley of darkness” (Ps.22)*. But it was exactly that which Abraham accepted. God asked him to leave his home, and promised he would give him a new land; but when Abraham died, he had nothing – living in a tent, as the reading says. Nevertheless, throughout his life Abraham kept faith. God promised that he would become the father of a great people, but as an old man Abraham still did not have any children, yet he continued to trust. However, when eventually his son, Isaac, was born, he became his only hope for the promised descendants. Yet, even when extraordinarily God asked him to sacrifice Isaac, Abraham did not lose trust in God. He is indeed a model of faith, “our father in faith”!

Thinking of the example of Abraham gives a sharper focus to the teaching of Jesus in today's Gospel. He reminds us of the destiny lovingly prepared for the faithful, *“There is no need to be afraid, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom.”* Following the example of Abraham, we are to be people of faith who never grow weary of trusting in God's promise, no matter how bleak or unpromising the situation may appear. The Apostle writes, *“We know that when the tent that we live in on earth is folded up, there is a house built by God for us” (2Cor.5:1).*

Meanwhile, like servants waiting on their master's return – we listen attentively for the Lord’s footfall and knock. In his words, *“Happy those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes”*.

*“God, our Father, we pray:*

*that your grace keeps us alert,*

*that our hearts*

*may not be wearied by the cares of life.*

*May we be standing ready*

*when the Son of Man comes.”* **Amen.**