



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

2nd Sunday of Lent Year A

The Promise to Abraham

Readings: *Genesis 12: 1—4a, Ps 33, 2 Timothy 1:8b-10, Matthew 17:1-9*

The three great monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, all claim a common origin in the person of the Patriarch, Abraham. In the case of Judaism & Christianity, there is a huge and overwhelming common heritage in the vast bulk of holy scripture which we refer to as Bible. In the third, Islam, there is no such obvious commonalty but rather an individualistic rewrite of some of that scriptural content according to a new and 'corrective' revelation. But all three look to Abraham. He is God's called and chosen. He is both the object and instrument of God's reboot of humanity in the wake of the tragedy of The Fall, the Judgement of the Flood and the shattered hubris of Babel's Tower.

We know a little about his origins in Ur of the Chaldees, a little of his family – there is an extensive genealogy rooting him firmly in the descendants of Shem, the origin of Shemites or Semitic peoples. We hear the recall of this origin in the presentation of the gifts at Harvest (Deut 26) when the words spoken are:

'A wandering Aramean was my father....'

It is a reminder that all is gift from God. The People of God have inherited the Land of Promise. They were not originally there. They

are migrants and wanderers on the earth. Later in the generations of the Promise we encounter Jacob who will become Israel, father of the twelve tribes. Jacob's mother's family was Aramean. His maternal grandfather is called Aramean (Gen 25:20; 28:5) and so is his uncle Laban (Gen 31:20, 24). The place Jacob fled to was called Paddan-Aram, outside the land of Canaan (Gen 25:20; 28:2,5-7; 31:18; 33:18; 35:9,26). Eleven of Jacob's sons were born in Paddan-Aram (Gen 35:22-26 cf. 33:1-2). It was where he spent the best part of his life. The people of God will not come into the full promise to Abraham this side of the sojourn in Egypt and the liberator, Moses.

But to return to Abraham. It is to him that the promise is given, long before the covenant of the Law. It is Abraham who will hear the promise, under the dazzling night of a desert sky, that he, old and with a barren wife, will have descendants as countless as the stars of heaven. It is Abraham who will encounter the angels of the Trinity at the Oaks of Mamre. It is Abraham, whose obedience in the sacrifice of Isaac on Mt. Moriah, will prefigure the sacrifice of Christ on that same high place, where God spared the Son of Man and Man did not spare the Son of God.

Abraham has a relationship with God that is based on promise not law, on the heart to heart of Man with God, on the response to the divine calling. It is foundational to the later Christian claim, as St Paul rightly emphasises, that the Law is overtaken by and transitional from the original promise to Abraham, now fulfilled in Christ.

The Jews are not accidental or incidental to the history of salvation but integral to God's long plan of history. The centrality of their call is underlined in virtually every chapter of Matthew's Gospel and the

Gospel of today could not more powerfully emphasise the robust continuity of God's intention for the plan of salvation. Christ, irradiated, transfigured, shining with the glory of Heaven, is accompanied by and borne witness to by the great representatives of the bearers of the Word Of God, the prophets, in the figure of Elijah. and by the mediator of the interim covenant of the Law, Moses. JESUS Christ, God-Man, Saviour, is the Heir of David, He is the fulfilment of Israel. He is the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham. He is the only verifiable, credible fulfilment of the blessing, through Abraham, that is given to the world.