

Faithfulness

I was talking to some people the other day and we were talking about the ordination and how it is like a marriage. It is true in some sense because celibacy is a way of loving God with an undivided heart. Then a lady said to me, “well, unlike in marriage, at least you will know who is always in the wrong in your relationship!” Very good point! Indeed, if there are some issues in my relationship with the Lord, then most likely the issue is me.

However, this comment highlights something that our readings emphasize today: that God is always faithful. Always.

There are two promises in this passage of Genesis. Abraham complains that he has no heir except Eliezer and Eliezer is not related to Abraham at all. Eliezer is just the slave or servant of Abraham so Abraham is concerned that his inheritance will go not to his own son and family but to his slave.

So then the Lord explicitly tells him that an heir will come from your own issue, your own flesh, and he shows him the numerous stars in the skies as a metaphor of the numerous descendants that Abraham will have. But when God shows Abraham the land that he will give to his descendants, Abraham wonders how he is going to possess the land?

Then God gets Abraham to do this weird thing where Abraham cuts the goat, the ram and the heifer into two pieces and then he has this weird dream where a flaming pot is swinging in between the half pieces of the animals. But notice what the text says next: then God made a covenant with Abraham.

What God is trying to communicate through this image is this: let this be done to me if I do not fulfill my promise. In other words, let me be cut in half if I do not fulfill this promise which has now been elevated to a covenant. I swear I will give you this land. I swear I will be faithful to you, always.

This is what we hear in the psalm today: the Lord remembers his covenant forever.

But the challenge of the old covenant, the old testament is that God was always faithful and we were not. The law of the old covenant pointed out the way they should live and act and how to be faithful to God, but they people of Israel did not have the capability to fulfill it. Why did God give them the old covenant and the law then?

The law was given so that grace would be sought and grace was given so that the law could be fulfilled (St. Augustine).

The law was given so that we could see the inadequacies of our own human effort apart from grace and therefore, we acknowledged our weakness and our poverty and received the grace so that we could fulfill the law. The amazing thing about God is that although he sees his unfaithful children, he is always faithful and he even gives us the grace to be faithful.

“This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD. I will put my law in their minds and inscribe it on their hearts” (Jer 31:33).

Brothers and sisters, we are called to the incredibly high standard of faithfulness to God. That is the type of fruit we are called to produce, but so many times in our lives we produce the other fruit, the bad fruit of unfaithfulness. Therefore, let us dig our roots deep into the streams of his grace and mercy so that we can be faithful to the one who is always faithful to us.