

Abram, soon to become Abraham, is directed by God to leave his home, his clan, and his ancestral land. He is leaving behind all he has, all those he knows, and his inheritance. God has promised to make him the father of a great nation, one gifted with special favors from God, to include being mediators of God's blessings to others. Abram doesn't quibble about the details, he doesn't ask and questions or make any complaints, he just packs up and goes as God directed.

Abram makes the sacrifice of leaving his home, first and foremost because God directed it, but also because God made him a promise. God offered to fulfill the deepest desire of his heart. He promised at least one child, and from that child numerous grandchildren and great grandchildren who would become a great nation.

Abram's nation would be great in the eyes of men, and more importantly, great in the eyes of God. All the Old Testament Prophets are from Abraham's line. David and Solomon are from Abraham's line. Joseph and Mary are from Abraham's line. Jesus Christ is from Abraham's line.

We recognize Abraham as our father in faith and remember the 'promise that God made to our fathers, to Abraham and his children forever' every evening as part of the daily prayer of the Church. All because Abram listened to God, trusted God, and made a relatively small sacrifice to comply with what God asked of him.

Just think about this, who in his extended family, his clan, would have thought that we would still be talking about Abram soon to become Abraham 4,000 years or so after he packed his bags and left his ancestral home? Only Abram because he trusted God.

During this season of Lent we are asked to make some small sacrifice to grow closer to God. We always seem to have an issue with keeping our Lenten promises and for many of us, by time we hit this second week in Lent we have already fallen off the wagon and are ready to give up and try again next year.

Why is it so hard? Why can't we keep our small promises, our small disciplines? Sometimes it is because our Lenten sacrifice is too small

or too routine. Sometimes it is because we mistakenly believe that our Lenten promises should make us miserable.

As an example, for small children, giving up chocolate or sodas for Lent may be appropriate. It is difficult for them, not just because they gave up sweets, but because the sweets usually aren't replaced with an opportunity for growth. For children, some veggies for a snack, or fruit juice for a drink. Something to help them modify their craving for sweets into something that is better for them and helps them to grow.

As adults, we need more of a challenge, and more opportunity for growth. We need the opportunity to grow in faith through prayer and reflection as well as the opportunity to exercise our faith through our good works. There needs to be a balance between prayer and works and that balance is different for each and everyone of us.

Between Father Gaul and I you probably hear about the importance of prayer about every other week. Prayer as an individual, prayer as husband and wife, prayer as a family and prayer as a community. When will we stop beating this drum? Never, it is too important for developing and enriching our personal relationship with God. We may cut you some slack and let the discussion be every 3rd or 4th Sunday when the church is packed out for Holy Hour on Wednesday evening and there is standing room only at Mass on Sunday... or not!

Then there are works. The active exercise of our faith, the times when we get outside of ourselves and try to help others. Caring for the sick, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and visiting the imprisoned. Not just those in jail but also those imprisoned by circumstance; the sick and those who are shut in the house, the people in nursing homes and hospitals. What about teaching those who don't know about the faith or those who want to learn more about our faith, including our own families? How about just pitching in and helping someone with some chores without any thought of reward?

Where do we find the time for this? After all, time is the limited resource. We have 24 hours in the day. 8 for work or school, 2 for commuting back and forth, 3 for meals, and allegedly 8 for sleep. That fills 21 hours with just the basics of living leaving 3 hours for prayer, entertainment, and all of those other things that we want to do with our time.

We find the time by what we sacrifice. Maybe we give up a meal and spend the time in prayer, or we turn off the TV for a couple of evenings and use the time for Holy Hour and visiting the nursing home. What about getting up 30 minutes early and using that time to build a habit of daily prayer?

The next question that comes up is how do we know that we are doing the right prayers, the right works? Many people love the Rosary. I love Mary, but my wife will be happy to tell you that the Rosary is my personal cure for insomnia. It relaxes me so much that she has had to wake me up in the middle of more than one Hail Mary while I was leading the Rosary here in the church. I need a different prayer and that is OK.

I love ministering to the sick and helping people in hospice. My wife wants to take them all home and make them all better and when she can't it makes her so upset that she cries. She needs a different way to serve God's people and that is OK.

We always seem to be caught between what brings us joy and "thy will be done". For some reason we think that the two are incompatible and nothing could be further from the truth. God has given each of us gifts that we are to use to help each other. Sometimes we try to force the gifts into our preconceived notion of what we must do and in the process we are miserable, fail to meet our goals, get discouraged and the devil has a party.

God didn't just tell Abram to pack up and leave, he promised rewards that would bring Abram joy. The way we know if we are on the right path to God is by the joy we experience by being on the path. That is how God lets us know that we are doing what he wants us to do. It doesn't mean that we won't try to out stubborn God. I knew that I needed to be a Deacon for nearly a year before I finally surrendered and said yes. After all of the struggles to find where God wants me to be, I can sincerely say that I've never been happier. The same is true for everyone, there is something wonderful and fulfilling that serves others in God's plan for you. You just have to be willing to do the work to find what it is

As you search for the works that fit your circumstances, you will face the your set of struggles. Don't be discouraged if you don't find a great fit to start. I did a stint in prison ministry and discovered that it

is not for me. Most of my friends in prison ministry can't understand how I can enjoy hospice ministry. In each case it is because we are working where God wants us to work and God lets us know that by the joy and satisfaction we get from our work.

If you just can't get going on your prayer life, switch to a different form of prayer. If you don't know where to go, call the office and make an appointment so we can talk and see what ideas we can come up with to help you on your journey. If you pick up a spiritual book to read and it just isn't working, put it down and pick up another one. You can come back to it at another time. This isn't college; no term papers and only one test. It is a compressive final and with a second chance if we need it.

Abram's deepest desire on earth was for a child. What is our deepest desire on earth? Most of us think it has to do with money or success, but if and when we decide to dig into it, we will find the deepest desire of our hearts on earth has more to do with family than money and more to do with love than success. In making that discovery, we will find that in making God happy, we will be happy as we look forward to joining Abraham and our fathers in heaven.