

In our first reading, we heard what might sound like a downright bizarre story about Abraham. Abraham, sometimes called the Father of Faith, serves as the central character in what can be thought of as the beginning of a new section in the *Book of Genesis*. Up to that point, it's as though everything is told from a mile-high view, in cosmic proportion: creation of the universe, the universal condition of original sin, the flooding of the world, and so on. With Abraham—or more correctly at this point, he's known as Abram—we begin to zoom-in to a specific person and his life.

Abram had been born in a distant land, having no awareness of the God who would eventually call him out of thin air, like a voice in his head: *“Go forth from your land, your relatives, and from your father's house to a land that I will show you. . . All the families of the earth will find blessing in you”* (Gen 12:1-3). Perhaps inexplicably to us, Abram went, having no certainty of where God was leading him.

Along the way, God promised: *“I will give you numerous descendants”*. Abram had no children despite being already aged, but the cruel irony was that his very name means Beloved Father. Yes, I will give you descendants, and I will give you land, despite the fact that he was a wandering vagabond. All these promises God made, and Abram kept moving, still with no certainty of exactly how or when God's plan would come together.

Eventually, perhaps worn-out from wandering, and beginning to entertain doubt, Abram asked if he had understood God's intentions correctly. The LORD told him to look at the stars in the sky, to see if he could count them. The verses that follow subtly indicate that it was daytime. *How could Abram, or any of us, count the stars, especially in the daytime?* With Abram still unclear, the LORD led him through an ancient covenant ritual, meant for two parties to demonstrate commitment. After sacrificing specified animals, the next step of the ritual would be for both parties to walk between these halved animals (Gross, right?). By doing so together, it was a way of saying, *“May what happened to these animals, happen to me, if I don't uphold what we've promised”*.

But just before they were to do this, a mysterious phenomenon occurred: a heavy darkness descended upon Abram, putting him into a state of sleep. Then, God, imaged as fire in the darkness—just as He was when the Israelites would later pass through the Red Sea—passed through the remains of the sacrificed animals. It was God's way of telling Abram, *I will uphold my promise to you*.

Perhaps you've wondered about your call from God—this call we take on faith, and how fragile our faith can be. Maybe like Abram, wondering, *Did He actually call me?* And like Abram, who for as long as he remained childless and displaced, wondering, *“God when are you going to do what you said you would?”*. I suspect every one of us has moments—examining where we are in life—wondering if we understood God correctly—where he intended to lead us, and if what He promised is real.

These thoughts and inevitable questions are exactly why we keep the stories of these figures of our faith before us, and why we recount the lives of the saints, time and time again. We can look back on the entirety of their lives in ways that we can't our own. In looking back on their lives, we see how God keeps His promises, even as it feels to us like we're wandering and waiting.

In describing that mysterious event in the darkness, and the sacrificed animals, our reading today says that *“It was on that occasion that the LORD ‘made’ a covenant with Abram”*. In English we use the word ‘made’, but in Hebrew the word is *karath*, meaning *cut*. As the animals were cut-open, God cut a covenant with Abram.

Just as God cut a covenant with Abram, so He does with you at this altar. To show His commitment, God was willing to be cut, in order to carry out His plan for you. We see it on the cross, but we experience and receive it from this altar, as this Eucharist presents his body split in two.

As we process toward his Body and Blood, not so different from the covenant ritual that would have had Abram passing between those halved animals, let us try to be mindful of at least two things: First, that this Eucharist is a living sign of the covenant that God cut with you—you, personally. May we approach it with the awe that Abram had in his covenant act with God. And second, that we know, our God keeps His promises, even when

we can't understand how and when they'll be fulfilled—like trying to count the stars in the sky at daytime. Let us pray for the steadfast faith of Abram.