

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today's first reading from Genesis continues last Sunday's first reading. In today's reading, Abraham bargained with God over the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah by appealing to God's sense of justice. He asked if God would destroy the innocent with the guilty if he found 50 good people in the cities and then kept bargaining until he was down to 10 good people. Abraham showed a lot of nerve. I wonder how many of us have ever bargained with God promising to do something if God did something for us.

We need to note that Abraham was not bargaining for himself but for the innocent people of those cities. However, I suppose one could argue that he was bargaining for his nephew Lot and his family who lived in Sodom. More importantly, we should ask what gave Abraham the nerve or the courage to bargain with God multiple times. I would suggest it was because he had had a personal encounter with God who promised to make him a great nation.

My guess is that most of us believe that if God appeared to us, we would be overwhelmed and frightened out of our wits. Most of us believe that we would feel so unworthy that we would be face down on the ground. Abraham was able to stand face-to-face with God because his experience of God was real.

There are several signs of an authentic experience of God:

- An authentic experience of God deepens our faith in God.
- An authentic experience of God also deepens our self-confidence. This is precisely what Abraham experienced.
- Paradoxically, a true experience of God also makes us more humble. In other words, a true experience of God helps us see ourselves as we really are, as God sees us.
- An authentic experience of God deepens our love for our neighbor. An experience of God that causes us to love others less because we love God more is not a true experience of God. As St. John wrote in his First Letter, we cannot love the God we do not see if we do not love the neighbor we can see.
- An authentic experience of God gives us joy, an inner peace or contentment that is not disturbed by trivial things.
- Finally, if we have had an authentic experience of God, we do not become obsessed with experiencing God. We know, for example, that some people are addicted to God and religion.

Our brief reading from Paul's Letter to the Colossians helps us understand the meaning of our baptism. St. Paul tells us that we were buried with Christ in baptism and then raised with him through faith in the power of God who raised Jesus from the dead. In the early church, people to be baptized went down into the water and came out the other side, symbolizing dying with Christ, i.e., dying to selfishness and sin, being buried with him, and then rising to new life, the life of grace, with him. When they came out of the water, they were clothed in a white garment which they wore for a week as the symbol of newness of life.

Finally, my brothers and sisters, in today's Gospel, the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray as John had taught his disciples. Jesus then taught them the Our Father. Luke's version of the Our Father is shorter than Matthew's version, the version we pray every day. The beauty of both versions is their simplicity. Jesus went on to promise that if we ask, we will receive, if we seek, we will find, and if we knock, the door will be opened to us. Perhaps one of the reasons for lack of faith today is that we—the Church, priests, and ourselves—have over complicated everything, including faith, prayer, our relationship with God and Jesus, and religion. For example, Jesus' parables were simple stories. The Our Father is a simple prayer. If we want to have a personal encounter with Jesus, perhaps we need to pray with simple words.