

The Faith of Abraham and the Spiritual Life

The Catechism on Abraham as the Model of Faith

By faith, man completely submits his intellect and his will to God. With his whole being man gives his assent to God the revealer. Sacred Scripture calls this human response to God, the author of revelation, "the obedience of faith" (Rom 1:5). To obey (from the Latin *ob-audire*, to "hear or listen to") in faith is to submit freely to the word that has been heard, because its truth is guaranteed by God, who is Truth itself. *Abraham is the model of such obedience offered us by Sacred Scripture.* (CCC 143-44)

The Threefold Promise to Abram (75 years old)

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to (1) *the land* that I will show you. And (2) *I will make of you a great nation*, and I will bless you.. and (3) *by you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.*" So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. *Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.* And Abram took Sar'ai his wife, and Lot his brother's son.. they set forth to go to the land of Canaan. When they had come to the land of Canaan... there was a famine in the land. So Abram went down to Egypt to sojourn there, for the famine was severe in the land. (Genesis 12:1-10)

The Faith of Abram

After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Elie'zer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "Behold, thou hast given me no offspring; and a slave born in my house will be my heir." And behold, the word of the LORD came to him, "This man shall not be your heir; your own son shall be your heir." And he brought him outside and said, "*Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.*" Then he said to him, "*So shall your descendants be.*" *And he believed the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness.* (Genesis 15:1-6)

1. The First Sacrifice of Abram: Animals

And he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." But he said, "*O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?*" He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a she-goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." And he brought him all these, cut them in two, and laid each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, Abram drove them away. *As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram; and lo, a dread and great darkness fell upon him.* Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be slaves there, and they will be oppressed for four hundred years; but I will bring judgment on the nation which they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions..." *When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.* On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this *land*, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites." (Genesis 15:12-21)

Abram Falls Again: Hagar and Ishmael (86 years old)

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bore him no children. She had an Egyptian maid whose name was Hagar; and Sarai said to Abram, "Behold now, the LORD has prevented me from bearing children; go in to my maid; it may be that I shall obtain children by her." And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. So, *after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan*, Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar the Egyptian, her maid, and gave her to Abram her husband as a wife. And he went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked with contempt on her mistress. And Sarai said to Abram, "May the wrong done to me be on you! I gave my maid to your embrace, and when she saw that she had conceived, she looked on me with contempt. May the LORD judge between you and me!" But Abram said to Sarai, "Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her as you please." Then Sarai dealt harshly with her, and she fled from her... And Hagar bore Abram a son; and Abram called the name of his son, whom Hagar bore, Ishmael. *Abram was eighty-six years old when Hagar bore Ishmael to Abram.* (Genesis 16:1-6, 15)

2. The Second Sacrifice of Abram: Circumcision (99 years old)

When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. *And I will make my covenant between me and you, and will multiply you exceedingly.*" Then Abram fell on his face; and God said to him, "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be *Abram* (Hebrew "great father") but your name shall be Abraham (Hebrew, "Father of a multitude"); for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you. And I will establish *my covenant* between me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. And I will give to you, and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." And God said to Abraham, "...*This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your descendants after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you. He that is eight days old among you shall be circumcised...* So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant. Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant." And God said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai (Hebrew "my princess"), but Sarah (Hebrew "princess") shall be her name. I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her; I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples shall come from her." Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said to himself, "*Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?*" And Abraham said to God, "O that Ishmael might live in thy sight!" God said, "No, but Sarah your wife shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him... I will establish my covenant with Isaac, whom Sarah shall bear to you at this season next year." When he had finished talking with him, God went up from Abraham. (Genesis 17:1-22)

The Birth of Isaac and the Fulfillment of God's Promise

The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised. And Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac (Hebrew, "He laughs"). And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. *Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.* And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; every one who hears will laugh over me." And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would suckle children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age." And the child grew, and was weaned; and Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned. (Genesis 21:1-8)

3. The Third Sacrifice: His Only Beloved Son, Isaac

After these things *God tested Abraham*, and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." He said, "*Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering upon one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.*" So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; and he cut the wood for the burnt offering, and arose and went to the place of which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw the place afar off. Then Abraham said to his young men, "Stay here with the ass; I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you." *And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it on Isaac his son;* and he took in his hand the fire and the knife. So they went both of them together. And Isaac said to his father Abraham, "My father!" And he said, "Here am I, my son." *He said, "Behold, the fire and the wood; but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" Abraham said, "God will provide himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."* So they went both of them together. When they came to the place of which God had told him, *Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar, upon the wood.* Then Abraham put forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here am I." He said, "Do not lay your hand on the lad or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." And Abraham lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, behind him was a ram, caught in a thicket by his horns; and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the name of that place "*The LORD will provide;*" as it is said to this day, "*On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.*" And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, and said, "By myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will indeed bless you, and I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies, and by *your descendants shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.*" So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beer-sheba; and Abraham dwelt at Beer-sheba. (Genesis 22:1-19)

The Location of Mount Moriah

Then *Solomon began to build the house of the LORD in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah*, where the LORD had appeared to David his father, at the place that David had appointed, on the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite (2 Chronicles 3:1)

The Three Covenants

- 1. Abram’s Deep Sleep
(Promise of Land)
- 2. Covenant of Circumcision
(Promise of Descendants)
- 3. Sacrifice of Isaac
(Promise of Blessing for All Nations)

The Three Sacrifices

- His Animals
- His Own Flesh
- His Only Beloved Son

The Three Ages of the Interior Life

- 1. Purgative Way
(Spiritual Childhood)
- 2. Illuminative Way
(Spiritual Adolescence)
- 3. Unitive Way
(Spiritual Adulthood)

Three Sacrifices

- Sacrifice of Animals
- Sacrifice of Flesh
- Sacrifice of His Only Son

Three Virtues

Pope Francis on the Faith of Abraham

Faith opens the way before us and accompanies our steps through time. Hence, if we want to understand what faith is, we need to follow the route it has taken, the path trodden by believers, as witnessed first in the Old Testament. Here a unique place belongs to Abraham, our father in faith... (Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter *Lumen Fidei*, no. 8, 11)

The Faith of Abraham in the New Testament

By *faith* (Greek *pistis*; Latin *fide*) Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go. By *faith* he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. *For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.* By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore. *These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.* For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. *But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.* By *faith* Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your descendants be named." *He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; hence, he did receive him back, and this was a symbol (Greek *en parabolē*). (Hebrew 11:8-19).*