

25. June 2021

“God's Promises Are Sure”

Gen 17:1.9-10.15-22

When Abram was ninety-nine years old Yahweh appeared to him and said, 'I am El Shaddai. Live in my presence, be perfect, God further said to Abraham, 'You for your part must keep my covenant, you and your descendants after you, generation after generation. This is my covenant which you must keep between myself and you, and your descendants after you: every one of your males must be circumcised. Furthermore God said to Abraham, 'As regards your wife Sarai, you must not call her Sarai, but Sarah. I shall bless her and moreover give you a son by her. I shall bless her and she will become nations: kings of peoples will issue from her.' Abraham bowed to the ground, and he laughed, thinking to himself, 'Is a child to be born to a man one hundred years old, and will Sarah have a child at the age of ninety?' Abraham said to God, 'May Ishmael live in your presence! That will be enough! 'But God replied, 'Yes, your wife Sarah will bear you a son whom you must name Isaac. And I shall maintain my covenant with him, a covenant in perpetuity, to be his God and the God of his descendants after him. For Ishmael too I grant you your request. I hereby bless him and will make him fruitful and exceedingly numerous. He will be the father of twelve princes, and I shall make him into a great nation. But my covenant I shall maintain with Isaac, whom Sarah will bear you at this time next year. 'When he had finished speaking to Abraham, God went up from him. '

God's promises are true and reliable. Even if people, based on their human experience, regard something as impossible - as shown in this case by Abraham's reaction and later by that of his wife Sarah (cf. Gen 18:9-12) - God's plans do not change. He does what he says. This is how Jesus expresses it in the Gospel: “*Sky and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.*” (Mt 24:35).

There are so many promises of God on which we can build our whole life, thus overcoming the fickleness of human securities. “*Do not put your trust in princes, in any child of Adam, who has no power to save*”, the psalm tells us (146:3), warning us that only in the Lord can we find ultimate security.

Abraham had received the promise that he would become the father of many nations (cf. Gen 12:2). However, he and his wife continued to grow old, and it did not seem to be fulfilled. But God appeared to him in his old age to fulfil his promises. We men may think that God delays, when the time is getting longer and longer and the promises are not yet fulfilled (cf. 2 Pet 3:9). However, the Lord comes when the time has come and matured.

This is an important lesson for our spiritual life! Our task is to walk uprightly in the presence of the Lord and to remain faithful to him, as God makes it clear to Abraham in this passage. God wants to carry out his plan of salvation with us and through us, but not without our participation. This brings to mind the Lord's words: "*Set your hearts on his kingdom first, and on God's saving justice, and all these other things will be given you as well.*" (Mt 6:33)

Perhaps one sometimes gets anxious, wanting to know what is, after all, the special mission that one has to fulfil in this world, what is the vocation that has been given to one, etc. This restlessness is not wrong if one feels that one is missing something and is not being vigilant enough; if one is letting life pass one by, etc....

But such a restlessness makes no sense when one is already treading one's way day by day to the best of one's ability. In this case, we must practise the virtue of patience and trust, until we understand more precisely what the Lord intends to do with us. We are not wasting time here, because the plan of salvation, the vocation or mission entrusted to us is in God's hands. If God has a plan and we do not close ourselves off, sooner or later he will bring it to pass. In the case of Abraham, it happened in his old age. But if, for example, we concretely recognise a call that is addressed to us, we can no longer hesitate.

There are promises of the Lord concerning our Church, and we must hold fast to them. Anyone who looks closely will see that many things in the Church have fallen into disarray. However, the Lord tells us that "*the gates of the underworld can never overpower it*" (Mt 16:18). Precisely when there seems to be no solution, these words are a guarantee that, in the midst of so much confusion, the Lord will direct everything according to His will. In His promises we can firmly trust, even if everything seems to have no way out.

This applies to all situations. It is good to know the Lord's words well and to hold fast to them in all circumstances. Even if you personally find yourself in darkness and see no way out, the Lord's promises are still the light in the darkness.

Because of his advanced age, Abraham could not imagine that he would still be able to father a son. Through Abraham's experience, let us also learn to trust God more deeply, no matter how impossible the situation may seem. The Lord loves it when we cling to His Word and lean on it!