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LETTER TO THE ROMANS

The father of all believers



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Rom 4:13-17

He promise to Abraham and his descendants, that they should inherit the world, did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. If it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his descendants—not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham, for he is the father of us all, as it is written, “I have made you the father of many nations”—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

In chapter 4 of the Letter to the Romans, the Apostle to the Gentiles reviews the figure of Abraham, the father of faith. His intention is to emphasise that Abraham did not receive God's promises by virtue of his works but by his faith and trust in the Lord. This was credited to him as righteousness. Thus, St. Paul emphasises that justification is a grace from God that He wanted to grant to Abraham and to all those who ‘come from the faith of Abraham’.

Abraham did not doubt God's promise incredulously, but was strengthened in his faith and glorified the Lord with the firm conviction that He has the power to fulfil what He has promised, however impossible it may seem. This faith was credited to him as righteousness.

From these considerations, Paul goes on to speak of faith in Jesus Christ and concludes chapter 4 with the following words:

‘But the words, “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification.’ (Rom 4:23-25).

It is faith in Christ that justifies us and reconciles us with God. All nations are invited to embrace this faith. St Paul's theological considerations on the desolation among the Gentiles and the infidelity of the Jews must lead us to welcome the grace that God the Father grants us in Christ Jesus. Both pagan peoples and Jews can receive forgiveness for their sins and thus attain true life in God:

“God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. Not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation.” (Rom 5:8-11).

In the following verses, St Paul explains that through the transgression of one man, Adam, sin came into the world and, therefore, death came to all men. All humanity suffers the consequences, for Adam's sin also meant the loss of the Paradise that God had prepared for us and that we long for in the depths of our being.

Even if people do not know this doctrine, they sense that life in this world, with its various sufferings and death, cannot be what they were created for. The longing for redemption and a better world remains in human beings, even if they are not aware of it in their daily lives. Even if they have become accustomed to the many evils of the earth, the intuition that the condition in which they live cannot be all that life has to offer will not be completely extinguished.

God has mapped out the way for human beings to discover true life, so that they do not have to remain under the dominion of sin and darkness. He has paved a path for them to eternal life. He Himself came into the world to redeem us. St Paul expresses it this way: *‘Then as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man’s obedience many will be made righteous.’* (Rom 5:18-19).

God decided to overlook the time of ignorance, when the Gentiles could have recognised and honoured His invisible presence through the works of creation. He also wanted to overlook the transgressions of Israel when they did not follow His instructions.

In His Son Jesus Christ, God wants to gather the nations into the one true faith, so that men may be saved and attain eternal life. But for this offer of grace to become effective in your life, it is necessary that each person accept it.

Meditation on the day's reading: <https://en.elijamission.net/johns-testimony-2/>