

19th Sunday of Ordinary Time
Homily by Bishop Felipe J. Estévez
St. Catherine of Siena Parish, Orange Park
August 11, 2013

The Light of Faith

A famous saying about understanding Jesus' parables of the Kingdom is the already and not yet outlook. The letter to the Hebrews captures this double dimension: "faith is the realization what is hoped and the evidence of things not seen." The Christian way is sharing the gifts of faith and hope now ...as true pilgrims. At present, we find ourselves always in a dynamic disposition, moving toward, always gazing toward paradise, expecting a future of hope which we believe in. *Homo Viator.*

Scripture gives us today a perfect example; our father in faith Abraham. We just heard the beautiful reflection in Hebrews 11. His story is found in the book of Genesis (Chapter 17 and so on). In today's Mass we have a deep reflection on the experience of faith in the life of this elder.

Yesterday, I was at the Diocesan Women's Conference in downtown Jacksonville and I was delighted to find hundreds of cars with stickers that say, "I believe." I commented, secularism will not win, the believers will stand strong, I believe, I believe! Believers – you see them in churches, you find them in multiple works of mercy. Secularists are mostly invisible; we tend to find them as professors in colleges and universities, leaders in government. You find them as writers, and frequently exposed to TV programs. The common stand for secularists is that God does not really matter. Believers say: God is first, God is all, God is my greatest asset.

A friend of mine once said that idolatry is passing from one Lord to another. Idolatry does not offer a journey – but offers confusion leading to nowhere.

Abraham in contrast is the father of faith in one God par excellence. Faith is not primarily a definition learned by memory – faith is an experience of faithfulness. A very rich man in Iraq, Abraham married Sarah. God entered his life and of his family as well. He obeyed God's voice; he left his wealthy farm and became a pilgrim. Scripture says, "He went out not knowing where he was to go."

The Psalmist says, "Blessed be the nation whose God is the Lord, the people he has chosen for his own inheritance." The teachings of Vatican II, present the church as the people of God, the pilgrim people of God.

Because Abraham believed, Sarah became pregnant; a child was born and named Isaac. Abraham was challenged and tested; he thought he had to sacrifice that child. He was ready to act in fidelity to God's wishes. But God is a God of the living and would not accept sacrifices of human life.

He kept gazing toward a future of hope. Hebrew says: "his destiny was to seek beyond to a homeland beyond this one." That homeland is eternity, the City of God!

In this increasingly secular world so preyed upon by idols, Pope Benedict called for a Year of Faith which ends this October. The purpose of this year was to renew our faith, deepening our beliefs and our identity as a People of God. The expectation was to become more knowledgeable of the documents of Vatican II, assisted by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.

Recently, Pope Francis took notes prepared by Pope Benedict and he issued a teaching letter, *The Light of Faith* (light shining in the darkness). For some, an encyclical letter is good reading for scholars, people with a doctorate degree, but this letter is for us all. As your bishop, I hope all of you will learn something from this encyclical letter. Let me quote today from paragraph #22: “Faith becomes active in the Christian on the basis of the gift received, our love which attracts our hearts to Christ and enables us to become part of the Church’s great pilgrimage through history until the end of the world for those who have been transformed in this way. A new way of seeing opens up, faith becomes light for their eyes.”

We are the People of God today here and now in this holy assembly, we’re a priestly, prophetic people, a people with a mission of love, we are listeners of the word of God, with Father Abraham, and we say, Amen.

We are privileged to partake in this sacred meal, sacrament of sacraments which we as the body of Christ say amen to the body of Christ. The holy Mass, the Eucharist is our greatest aid to be a believer in contrast to the attractive and competing idols roaring around us.

I believe! Credo!