

## *The Second Sunday of Lent* *March 17, 2019*

*“It was on that occasion that the Lord made a covenant with Abram” (Genesis 15:18)*

In his book *Journey to Easter (Spiritual Reflections for the Lenten Season)*, Pope Benedict XVI took some time to explain this moment when God and Abram ratified their covenant relationship. We must understand that this sealing of the covenant through the slaughter and subsequent splitting of animals into two was a common practice. It was not considered gross or disgusting, rather it was performed by two parties who neither possessed an official written and binding language. Pope Benedict summed it up best with these words:

*“Two animals are divided into two and the contracting party passes in between the two halves. This action was a risky undertaking because it expressed an obligation which was final and irrevocable, bringing a kind of curse on oneself in the case of breaking the pact, and consequently a binding of one’s life and fortune by giving one’s word. The action says the fate of these animals divided in two will be mine if I am not faithful to my word. Like these animals I will be cut in pieces should I be unfaithful. The man doing this is saying that he is prepared to give his life for his word.” (p. 67)*

Abram, later renamed Abraham, displayed a tremendous amount of faith in God as he took those steps between the animal halves. He had to believe that this God, whom he had gotten to know as an adult, would be different from every other god Abram had heard of or believed in prior to this moment. This God would be a living God, who would be able to hold secure to this covenant for future generations. Even with his limited intellect and understanding of God, Abram still had to trustingly place one foot firmly down upon the ground as an act of total faith that God would never fail to live up to this covenant.

There is another way to view this pivotal moment as we turn our reflection to God’s understanding of this covenant relationship. Even before Abram took that first step, God knew mankind would fail to uphold their part of the covenant. Mankind, already defeated as a result of Adam’s decision in the Garden, would never have the capacity to completely live this relationship. Mankind was always going to fail. Mankind would forever remain split; never having the opportunity to bask in a restored relationship with his Creator. Sin and death would always be man’s destiny.

God knew all of this, even more than I or anyone could describe, and yet He allowed Abram to make that first step. Why? Because He Himself already knew and had already decided what had to be accomplished to fulfill the covenant. Man broke the covenant; therefore man must forfeit his life. But which man must be the one to perform this action? Again, God knowing this, knew no man ever born would be able to fulfill this punishment for failing to uphold the covenant. For God knew that only He Himself (as fully man) could offer the one sacrifice perfect enough to repair the breach in this covenant relationship. Even before Abram’s foot touched the earth, the Word of God, Jesus, had already consecrated Himself to His Father’s Will by offering to come to earth, live as we do, teach us of His Father, and conclude His ministry through the most perfect sacrifice ever offered, His life for you and I. May we live long enough to appreciate the gift given us and honor Him who sacrificed all for us to have this gift.