

Sixteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time
July 21, 2019

“Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations.”
(Genesis 17:4)

I have had the pleasure of reading and studying the Bible with parishioners and visitors on Saturday mornings at Saint Bridget parish. One thing I have learned from this experience is the Old Testament authors chose to record the story of our salvation history as they heard it; choosing not to leave out any details which later generations might consider unflattering. Such is the case with Abraham, our father in faith, and his wife, Sarah. They were an older couple. They had no heir due to Sarah being barren. Abraham is remembered for his obedience to God. This obedience is often a reason why he was considered a “Righteous” man. Yet, he was also a complex figure. He lied through fear, not once but twice, claiming Sarah was not his wife (12:10-20; 20:1-18). Oddly, in both situations, after it was revealed that Sarah was indeed his wife, Abraham was given gifts so as not to offend his god and then quickly ushered out of the area. In our modern era, some may consider this quite a beneficial scam for Abraham and Sarah. He was also a competent military warrior (14:14-16). Sarah, too, had her own issues. She was impatient (16:1-2), a liar (18:12-15), and jealous (21:8-21). Yet, despite both of their inconsistencies, God chooses to establish His covenant with these two.

One might question: “Why these two?” “Should not God have chosen someone else; a couple who would have been a better example?” Actually, God chose the perfect couple. They are a couple we can relate to. One whose very flaws are reminders that God can and often does work through families like theirs to accomplish His divine plan. Abraham and Sarah would do what God asked, even if His request seemed completely nonsensical (22:1-19). Yes, their spiritual journey would be a struggle, but so is ours.

Allow me to conclude by paraphrasing a statement from a Swiss woman and theologian, Adrienne von Speyr. In her book, “They Followed His Call”, she offered this thought:

(Paraphrasing) “God counts on you and I today because He could count on us yesterday. He pays no heed to the fact that our fidelity has today broken down, that today our Yes no longer has any force that it comes with hesitation, has perhaps become inaudible. God pays no heed to any of this because He has also taken this (our weakness) upon Himself, because God never tires, and vouches for the limitless, extensive and ever wider quality not only of His call, but also of our answer.”

God calls us because He knows that once we realize that we are called, then we will amend our lives so that we can fully say Yes to His eternal call to be with Him in this life and in the next.