

Second Hand Preacher

19th Sunday in Ordinary Time

August 7, 2016

Hebrews 11:1-2. 8-19

Definitions help bring clarity. They help us perceive a concept that at first may seem too big to grasp. Definitions also may be limiting, so the reader must beware. Our scripture passage this week begins with a definition. "Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and the evidence of things unseen." This is a great definition as it takes a word we throw around in church communities and give it a little meat. Faith is about hope and about the unseen. You can point to someone taking the actions of faith, but you can't point to faith itself.

The author to the Hebrews has an audience that is well-grounded in the Jewish Tradition. They would know more about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob more than they might know their own families. All of these patriarchs, that are recognized by both Jews and Christians, faced the faith question many times. Abraham sticks out the most for his great faith. The Jews would have been reminded how Abraham had to trust God knowing, even though he was childless, his ancestors would number as the stars in the skies and the grains of sand on the sea shore. He believed and it happened. Abraham again was asked to sacrifice his son Isaac. Abraham had to have great faith to trust that God would provide. God saw how faithful Abraham was so he gave him a replacement sacrifice for his son.

The author to the Hebrews shows that Christianity respects the faith of the patriarchs and uses them as building blocks for Christianity. Abraham is created in the image of our Father in Faith. The one who makes the covenant with Abraham is recognized as great indeed. The end of the reading says that Isaac is the symbol. He is the symbol of Jesus Christ. The difference is that Jesus was sacrificed once and for all. His pain is our gain. Every time Mass is celebrated we make memorial of that sacrifice. The Good Friday covenant brings forth the salvation of the world. The sacrifice replaces the Passover lamb. Jesus becomes the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Our faith has roots in Hebrew scripture and completion in Jesus Christ.