

**2 Lent – Year B – March 11, 2009 - Homily**  
**Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16; Psalm 22:22-30; Romans 4:13-25; Mark 8:31-38**  
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Perhaps the most memorable part of the 1975 movie *Mahogany* is the theme song; “Do you know where you’re going to?” sung by Diane Ross. The chorus speaks richly to this evening’s reading from Paul’s letter to the Church in Rome. Here’s what it says, “Do you know where you’re going to / Do you like the things that life is showing you / Where are you going to / Do you know? // Do you get / What you’re hoping for / When you look behind you / There’s no open door / What are you hoping for / Do you know?”

In the movie, a young fashion designer achieves fame, but on looking back realizes that the cost may have been too high. The song reveals a sad and reflective mood. Not bad themes for our own Lenten work of self-reflection and sadness for our sins that brings us back to the Lord in repentance! Paul is also in a reflective mood as he writes to the Church in Rome, as well as to you and me. He is talking about the patriarch Abraham and helping us to understand that Abraham’s faith was credited to him by God as an act of righteousness. God recognized Abraham’s faithful witness, indeed his witness of faith, and God blessed him as the father of all nations – both Jew and Gentile.

In Paul’s reflection on the gift of justification by faith through God’s grace, which is the basis of this portion of Romans, he describes Abraham’s faith that God’s promise to him would be fulfilled as “hoping against hope”. You and I might describe the same situation as being completely hopeless – one where we might be on our knees in fervent prayer, seeking God’s mercy to turn the situation around, because it is completely beyond our control. I think we can safely say that Abraham might have felt the same way. Abraham’s situation was like this. He was about one hundred years old and his wife Sarah was of a similar age. They had no children of their own, and it would seem by all the laws of nature that they were never going to have children. However, according to the reading from Genesis, God has come to Abraham and made a covenantal promise that he will be “the ancestor of a multitude of nations...” and that God will give Abraham a son by Sarah his wife. You and I may well take the time to reflect on Abraham’s life snapshots of which are presented for us in the Book of Genesis. And if we did, we may not see many open doors for him and Sarah at this point, especially in terms of having a child. We may well be wondering if Abraham was really convinced in what he was hoping for – a son to be born by his wife Sarah.

Yet Abraham and Sarah are an example to us all. God’s promise to them is the miracle of life, even when it is beyond their natural capability. Abraham’s hope is not misplaced; it goes beyond frantic prayer, to a steadfast and resolute faith in God as the creator and giver of all life. Abraham’s faith is synonymous with his hope in God, and the belief that God is God and will fulfill His promises. As scholar Michael Gorman reminds us, “Abraham bears witness not only to the nature of faith as trust and hope, but also to the nature of justification – receiving the promise of God through faith in God’s bringing life from death.” As we continue on our Lenten walk, this may be a good time to consider the nature of our own faith in God.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, you and I are participants in the New Covenant. Abraham’s life of faith, hope and trust in God that deepens even when the odds seem so against him is a signpost for us. He points ahead to God’s steadfast love and faithfulness. Abraham believed that God would give life where there was none, and no

reasonable hope of any. One aspect of our Lenten journey is to explore the depths of our faith, and maybe begin to uncover a few of those dark corners of our hearts and minds. It's a bit like spring cleaning – finding treasures under layers of dust, but also finding a few things that we had put away because they are painful for us and we were not quite ready to deal with them yet. In the shadowy parts of our lives, I know there are parts of my spirituality that I have left dormant, or allowed to atrophy. Perhaps in your own Lenten journey you have become aware of some of those realms in your own life. Like Diana Ross in the movie, we might ask ourselves “Do you and I know what we are hoping for?” Like Abraham we can find the answer as the hope of new life, where there is currently hibernation, weakness, dormancy, or even a part of our heart or mind that is close to dying because we have tried to hide it from God, or because we have misused a gift, or left a gift of God unused.

God gives Abraham and Sarah the power to create a new life, even when they are long past childbearing years. In fact, resting in the promise of God, we hear that Abraham and Sarah's trust in God grew, despite all appearances to the contrary. Even though there are doors behind us that are closed, and rightly so in many cases, when we look forward in faith and hope, God will always show us a new door that He has prepared for us to walk through. And for the doors inside us that we have firmly closed against God, perhaps this is the time when we can unlock them, and allow God's healing light to cleanse, redeem us from all pain, and bring forth new life. We stand in faith. Even in the twists and turns of Lent, through the darkness towards the glorious Light of Easter, you and I know where we are going. Our salvation, our hope in the Gospel is assured. Let us each consider this week asking God to help us to have the strength to face the shadows, and see what God's light can bring forth from the darkness. Let us put aside our sins, repent and return to the Lord, accepting God's grace-filled gift of forgiveness. These are gifts and promises from God.

Amen.