*When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him: “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you and will make you exceedingly numerous.” Then Abram fell on his face, and God said to him: “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You shall be the ancestor of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you. I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. God said to Abraham: “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her and also give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall give rise to nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”*

Genesis 17:1-7, 15-16

*For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there transgression. For this reason, the promise depends on faith, in order that it may rest on grace, so that it may be guaranteed to all his descendants, not only to the adherents of the law but also to those who share the faith of Abraham (who is the father of all of us, as it is written: “I have made you the father of many nations”), in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. Hoping against hope, he believed that he would become “the father of many nations,” according to what was said: “So shall your descendants be.” He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was already as good as dead (for he was about a hundred years old), and the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, being fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised. Therefore “it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Now the words: “it was reckoned to him,” were written not for his sake alone but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over for our trespasses and was raised for our justification.* Romans 4:13-25

*The Sunday school teacher was just finishing a lesson on honesty. “Do you know where children go if they don’t put their money in the collection plate?” the teacher asked.*

*“Yes ma’am,” one of the boys blurted out. “They go to the movies.”*

Looking for an Honest Man.

1. A few weeks ago I shared with you a story about Diogenes, the Greek philosopher who supposedly, as the story tells, searched the streets of Athens with the lamp in his hand, famously saying: *“I am looking for an honest man."* Whether the story is true or not I do not know, but Diogenes quest makes perfect sense if we look into the history of humanity. From the day of creation, the honesty was something to be desired, but not necessarily easily found. Take a look on Adam when God approached him about eating of the forbidden fruit. Adam’s response was to blamed Eve, rather than admit his guilt. Eve did the same, when she blamed the *“serpent”* for deceiving her. In doing so, she inadvertently blamed even God, for after all, He was the one who created the *“serpent.”* Humanity’s unwillingness to trust God and to remain honest with Him, has always been at the forefront of people’s activities. Today, as we read the story of Abram and Sarai, we may see something else, something refreshing. We can clearly see their faith, and trust in God, even though it has been put to the ultimate test. Abram was told to leave the Ur of the Chaldean, and now was once again promised something that humanely speaking was impossible: *“I will bless her, and also give you a son by her.”* Remember, Abram is a 100 years old, while Sarai is in her 90’s.

2. The first time God promised Abram an offspring was long before that. When Abram and Sarai were in Shechem, in the land of Canaan God promised Abram to be the “father of the nations.” Abram was much younger then, he was only 75 years old, but over the years, as they travelled, he and Sarai realized they will not have children, so at some point Sarai concocted a plan whereas conceived by Abram, Ishmael was born to Sarai’s slave Hagar. Eventually, in his conversation with God, Abram concluded that Ishmael will be his heir, but God plainly told him: *“No. You and Sarah will have a son.”* At that point, it was hard for them to trust and to believe God, but as the Scriptures tell us, God kept His promise, and Isaac, the son of Abram and Sarai was born. Observing Abraham’s relationship with God, we must clearly see that Abram was and exceptional man, he was always honest with God, to the point that he would confront God and say: *“I and Sarai have no children, so, where are the descendants You promised me?”* He was not afraid to challenge God, to be honest with God, and share with Him his doubts and his fears. When we confront someone, just as Abram did confronting God, there is always the fear of a conflict to arise, but Abram is willing to do so, because he trusts God; he is honest with God. We all at times have our doubts, our fears, our uncertainties, but there is nothing wrong in raising them with God, after all, who else may understand them better than He?

3. People who are not able to be honest with God, people who do not trust God, live not only a dysfunctional lives, but themselves are dysfunctional. Conflict is a part of life, and of every relationship. The problem though is not with a conflict, but with how we are able to handle it. The proverbial *“elephant”* in the room at the social gatherings of our society today is: the politics, the money, and the religion. We do not talk about them. My question is why? Why can’t we live with the notions that we may agree to disagree? Why can’t we to share our views and opinion openly? Why, the *“common sense”* approach must be indeed perceived as *“politically incorrect”* in our society? The answer is simple, we do not trust one another anymore, but what is even worse, we often do not trust even God. As modern, sophisticated society, we prefer to seek our own *“solutions”* to everything we encounter in life. *“We cannot have children,”* Sarah said, *“so, Abram, have a child with my slave, Hagar, instead.”* Choosing the *“human, socially acceptable solution”* in that time, they created one of the greatest conflicts between the nations, the Arabs, the Ishmael’s descendants, and the Jews, known in history. Only, if we are able to trust one another, when we are able to *“put on the table,”* so to speak, all that we think, all that we feel, and we believe, even if these may engage us in some sort of conflicts, we may find healthy solutions to the life’s conflicts we face today. What is even mor important though, is that the same applies to our relationship with God.

4. Trusting God, being honest with Him, leads to the day when Abram becomes Abraham, and Sarai becomes Sarah, and the day when they become the parents of Isaac. Just as God promised. Just as God told them long time ago. We must realize that God has also promised to be with us, and to be always. Jesus said: *“I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* As we grow in trusting Him, as we are willing to be honest with God, as we are able to question, to raise our doubts and fears, with Him, we draw closer to our Savior, and we are able to follow His lead, without fear of being abandoned, forgotten or misplaced. In reality, it is us who mostly turn away from God, not the other way around. Many a time before I said that as humanity, we feel invincible, all-powerful, capable of creating solutions to all the problems we face, only to find out in the end that we are caught in the middle of the *“life’s maze,”* and cannot find our way out. We need God in our life, and our society today desperately needs God. If we, the Americans, finds ourselves in such a mess, it is we decided to turn away from God, and replaced Him with our, human resolve.

5. As Christians, we cannot create walls that separate us from God. Instead, we must remain honest and open with Him about all of our dreams, all of our fears, all of our expectations, disappointments, desires, and love; the list goes on and on. As Christians, we must learn to work together, and to grow, despite all the differences we may have, because in reality, any and every relationship encompasses different views and different opinions. We must find the mutual respect and understanding of other people’s views, and opinions, even if we disagree with them. As modern men, we cannot create the *“written in the stone”* approach, whereas it is *“my way or a highway.”* Unfortunately, this is what we see in our society today, whether in public, political or even social venues. In Abraham’s example, we see someone who was willing to question, and to even fight God, but he would do it honestly and openly, willing to learn God’s ways and God’s plans, even if he did not understand them at first. This is what the honest relationship is all about. In the end, as I already said, God rewarded Abraham and Sarah with fulfillment of His promises.

6. In the letter to the Hebrews Abraham is listed as one of the great man of faith, and rightly so, because after all, it was his faith that allowed him to question and to be honest with God. The truth is, that we cannot hide anything from God, He knows what is in the most innermost parts of our hearts and minds. He knows our thoughts even before we formulate them with words. So, honesty is imperative in our relationship with God. Faith is not the absence of questioning, but it is the willingness to be open and honest about who we are, what we believe, and even what our doubts may be. Faith leads us to believe and to trust God, even if we experience darkness in life. We just begun a 40 day’s journey through Lent, and in this time as we prepare to celebrate Easter, we must focus on where we are in that journey, and what our relationship with one another here and now, and with God, truly is. I firmly believe that as the “Body of Christ,” we must see ourselves as the Church, as His representatives here on earth, and as such we must be open to His direction and to His guidance.

7. God loves us. From the day of creation, He committed Himself to us, and even when we disobeyed Him, even when we turned away from Him, He never turned away from us. Instead, it was humans’ arrogance that moved people away from God. It was the 17th and 18th centuries’ Christian theologians who created a notion and a theological trend called *“deism,”* in which God, although the Creator of the universe, withdrew Himself from any relationship with His creation, including us, the humanity, and left us alone, to deal with our affairs on our own. What today’s reading however indicates very plainly, is that God established a permanent covenant with Abraham and consequently with us, and this covenant become the foundation of God’s dealing with the humanity and was never broken by God. Today, many Christians begin to move into a similar direction as the *“deists”* did, and many Christians became *“tone deaf”* to the voice of God. Today’s Church often becomes too arrogant to even listen to what God says. Today’s Church often needs to humbly accept God’s teaching, and to keep an open and honest relationship with Him. Today’s Christianity often needs to be transformed, and willing to do whatever God says, just as Abram and Sarai did, before they were transformed and called Abraham and Sarah. As Christ’s followers, we too must put aside the security we are used to, and to explicitly trust our God in everything. Such is our lesson from Abraham and Sarah.