

2nd Sunday of Lent

When my grandmother was a young lady, she fell in love with a young man who liked classical music. She told her parents about him, and her father said, "No. You are not going marry that man." My great-grandfather had another husband in mind for my grandmother, so she married him. She stayed friends with the first man she loved, and on the day she married the other guy, her original friend, who had been so dear to her, gave her as a wedding present a framed picture of six composers of classical music: Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Schubert and Wagner. I have that picture as an heirloom hanging on a wall in the rectory across the street. I see it every day. I'm sure the man my grandmother loved was a great fellow, but if she had married him, I wouldn't be here today. Some of the choices we make have lasting consequences.

Today's first reading is about a choice that changed the shape of world history. God chose Abram (later known as Abraham). The Book of Genesis offers no previous evidence that Abram had any idea who God was. Out of the blue, Abram one day heard the Lord speak these words to him: "Go forth from the land of your kinsfolk and from your father's house to a land that I will show you." Even before telling Abram what he would get out of this deal, God commanded him to give up everything that was dear to him - his country, his family, and his house. God did not even give Abram a clear destination - just "Give it all up and go where I tell you."

Then God made a series of promises to Abram: He would have children and material prosperity; he would win the esteem of others and bring blessing to them. Those who didn't like Abram would be cursed. Furthermore, Abram's blessing would extend beyond his own life to all the communities of the earth. At the time Abram had no children, no property, and no fame. This sounded like a pretty good deal, but a difficult one. He had to give up everything that was dear to him and follow the Lord.

Abraham appears in the first reading on the Second Sunday of Lent every year. He represents the mystery of God's choice. We Christians believe that God has chosen us for life in Christ. Even our catechumens who are preparing for baptism at Easter are not making this decision totally on their own. They are responding to God's call. First, God chose them. We celebrated this at the Rite of Election in the cathedral last week. They are elect, God's chosen people.

My brothers and sisters, you are here today because God has chosen you to enter the world when and where you did, to follow Christ, and to pursue a particular vocation, sometimes to enter religious life or to marry a particular person. We do not always respond to God's choice as generously as Abram or even my grandmother did. We sometimes prefer to choose our own will, rather than God's. We face choices every day: which words we say in conversation, how much we drink, or how we spend our free time. We also make important decisions that affect our whole life and the lives of others. If you are ever wondering which decision is the right one, open your heart to God's choice, even if he asking you to give up everything that is dear to you. God told Abram, "Go forth," and Abram went. If we imitate him, we will receive blessings beyond compare.

Sunday, March 12, 2017