

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

**The Promise to Abraham**      Twenty-eighth Week in Ordinary Time      Monday,  
October 10, 2016    8:15 AM    **Gal 4:22-24, 26-27, 31—5:1;**    Lk 11:29-32    (It's in Jesus  
that we see what God intended in the beginning in the Book of Genesis.)

**“The son of the slave woman was born naturally, the son of the freeborn through a promise.”**

We are always revisiting the origins of Israel and, for that matter, other Middle Eastern peoples. They still dominate the headlines: how ancient loyalties and ancient hostilities and ancient animosities continue in the world.

St. Paul is reflecting on the stories of the Book of Genesis, and he gets a lot out of them. He sees **in the miraculous birth of Isaac already a sign of Christ** actually, bringing forth out of barrenness what human life and nature could never bring out. **He sees Jesus as not only the descendant of Isaac and Abraham, but also the fulfillment of the promise**, because God promised Abraham that his posterity would be as uncountable as the sands on the shore of the sea. And this could not actually be true literally, if you only count the tribal peoples that identify with Abraham. So in Paul's mind this has to include another kind of descent, and that's why **in the Eucharistic Prayer Abraham is called “our father in faith,” because there's a different kind of descent**. We all become children of Abraham if we believe in the promise, if we believe in the fulfillment of the promise in Christ.

But again, I must mention that this is not anything against Judaism per se; rather it's a way of trying to reformulate the real nature of Judaism. Judaism had become a religion of the book. The book was the Torah, especially what we call the first five books, the Pentateuch. First and foremost that was the Bible, and it had enormous commentaries, even oral commentaries in Jesus' day. Later they became written down. This is what St. Paul is trying to sideline: laws and rules, the tradition of the elders, he is trying to sideline this and say that, no, **the real basis for**

**faith in the ancient peoples was the promise made to Abraham and that's now filled in Christ.** So it isn't the New Testament over the Old Testament. **It's the Old Testament of Abraham over the newer testament of Moses at Sinai.** That's the argument. It's very important we get it because many Christians haven't gotten it and they use St. Paul to battle Jews or Judaism. That's not the point. **It's a battle within Judaism for the real essence of what faith is about.**

**And Paul says it's really depending on God. That's what faith is about. It's not about obeying rules.** But there's something about obeying rules that people like. You can count them; even if you have thousands, you can still count them. You can check them off one after the other, and you can feel good about yourself if you fulfill them. But faith is different because **faith is a complete surrender to a power we cannot see or touch.** It is really **opening up the heart and the mind and the soul to what is beyond us.** **And that Paul says always was the essence of what it means to be an Israelite; that always was what it meant to be a child of Abraham.** And who was more faithful in this than Jesus? No one. So **it's in Jesus that we see what God intended in the beginning in the Book of Genesis.** And all those other things were fine for their time, but now their time is over.