

16 March

I have mentioned on a few occasions how often I admire stories of people who leave behind their homeland to travel to a new country, a new land and a new culture in order to settle down, rear a family and start a new life. These are stories particularly dear to my own family history, my grandparents like so many post-world war European migrants leaving behind the Italy they knew and loved and travelling that extraordinary distance to Australia, a land so new, so vast and so different from what they had known. Like so many migrants, my family came out with so little and yet has contributed so much to this great Australian story. It continues today for people who leave behind dangerous and perilous conditions and dream of coming to this new land of hope and opportunity.

Journey, travel, hope for the future, leaving behind the past, uncertainty along the road. As I have often said, before the bible touches something of the experience of faith, it often first touches something profoundly human. In today's first reading, the Lord said to Abram, 'leave behind your country, your family and your father's house and go towards the land that I promise you'. Abram is called to make a physical journey but also a journey of faith. He is asked to leave behind the security of what he knows, he is asked to make a mighty act of trust, he is asked to make a journey that perhaps will be long, possibly tiring, certainly demanding in all possible ways. Like all of life's journeys, not everything goes to plan and there are many unexpected surprises. And like many of life's journeys, deep within us arises these doubts and these questions; 'Is this the right path? Am I going in the right direction? Can I really trust what God says?

But the Lord makes Abram a promise and the Lord is faithful to his promise and his word. This character Abram becomes the father of a great people, a chosen people, God's one holy people. But on the journey, how does Abram know this? What happens in his moments of doubt? And is he tempted to turn back and go home? These are the deeply human questions of the bible that confront us long before the bible touches on questions of faith.

Jesus too is on a journey. He is on a journey to Jerusalem, to the mystery of his cross and resurrection. His disciples are on this journey too and along the way, they stop on this mountain for this amazing encounter with Jesus. It is a moment of such radiant goodness, they want to stay and pitch three tents, one for Jesus, one for Moses and one for Elijah. But they don't stay on the mountain. Jesus leads them down to continue the journey to Jerusalem. It will be a tough journey, it will be a long journey, it will be a somewhat brutal journey when Jesus is publicly tortured and then executed.

And along the journey doubts will arise in their hearts of his disciples. They will ask themselves, 'Can we trust what Jesus says? Do we really want to follow him to the cross? Does he really expect us to lay down our lives in the service of others? Is it better for us to turn around and go back home?

Lent is part of this mighty challenge to be faithful to God's word. We walk with Abram his journey of faith. We walk with Jesus his journey of faith. We walk with the disciples their journey of faith. We walk towards the mystery of the Lord's cross, towards the God who never ceases to call us out of darkness and into his own wonderful light.