



40th European Meeting of Young Adults

Standing upright thanks to God

After this, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward." But Abram said, "Sovereign Lord, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." Then the word of the Lord came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir." He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars — if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

(Genesis 15: 1-6)

Meditation for October (No. 1)

Abraham with his father left Ur, his native town in southern Mesopotamia, to go to Harran in the north. Then he set out again with his wife Sara and his nephew Lot, and he arrived in the Holy Land. But from there, too, he had to leave. Fleeing famine, he went into exile in Egypt. He returned to the Holy Land, but never to his hometown.

Abraham experienced instability. He never built a house, he lived in a tent. And he experienced discouragement when he saw no future. Like all of us, he needed a hope to live by. No one can live outside the current of life that keeps moving forward. Abraham desired a child, so that his descendants would assure him of a reputation and a future.

Reading the biblical text, we hear his complaint. In a vision, God assures him of his protection and great possessions. But he laments: "What can you give me? I remain without children..." God is slow to answer. And Abraham repeats his complaint: "You have given me no children..."

Abraham could have disappeared into oblivion like so many others before and after him. But we remember him, we Christians, and before us the Jews, and also the Muslims who call him Ibrahim. Why does this man, whose traces are lost in the night of ages, touch us?

The Bible delivers its secret: "Abraham believed in the Lord." But what does this phrase mean? Its meaning cannot be that Abraham began to believe that God exists. In his day, everyone believed that the gods exist.

35 years ago, an elderly man who had spent his life studying the Bible and the biblical languages, came to Taizé. He told us that believing in God meant making oneself stable in God. "Abraham made himself stable in God." To believe is to hold fast. To believe in God is to stand upright thanks to God.

Abraham, going from one country to another without ever settling permanently anywhere, established himself in God. He discovered that even in a life where the usual supports are lacking, it was possible to hold firm. He found in God an unexpected stability.

Did he seek faith and hope? Rather, they came to him: "The word of the Lord came to him", says the text. And Abraham trusted this word. God's promise to give him children as many as the stars in the sky was unbelievable. He could easily have brushed it aside. But he let the word of God set him upright.

The apostle Paul later wrote: "Hoping against all hope, Abraham believed and became the father of many peoples. The father of us all."

By making himself stable in God, Abraham found his right place: "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness". The Bible calls 'just' those who are faithful friends of God and other people, and living signs of a future. "The righteous will grow like a palm tree, he will grow like a cedar of Lebanon", a psalm sings.

It takes little to become one of those who, following Abraham, open paths of hope. We must first of all dare to complain, like Abraham, of what is wrong. Then it takes perseverance to wait for an answer, even when God keeps silent.

Faith is the surprise of being able to stand firm in spite of everything, to live, to go forward. God does not exist because we trust him, and he does not vanish when we do not. It is in the other direction: it is God who is the source of our firmness, our assurance. Faith is the access to the stability that is always in God, even when it is lacking in us.

Questions for sharing in small groups

- ▶ Among the people I know or hear of, are there any who are like Abraham?
In what ways do they resemble him?
- ▶ What do I want to complain to God about?
- ▶ Where and when have I see paths for the future open up?
Who opened them: people alone or together, in small or large numbers?
- ▶ What enables us to stand firm, to move forward?