

SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME.

2025

When Abraham and Lot were young and poor, and the Lord told them to leave their homeland and keep walking until He told them to stop, they obeyed. It would not be unfair to say that total obedience to God is easier when you are risking nothing besides your life. That isn't to take anything away from useful heroism, but it is a very hard thing to risk not only your life but also your career, your livelihood, your social position, your house, and your worldly goods. It is a brave thing in youth to resolve to give yourself to the service of God, come what may. Abraham and Lot did that. It is an even braver thing, requiring a deeper and steadier faith, to risk a good position in this world and the loss of abundant worldly goods in order to serve God faithfully.

Abraham and Lot prospered in the new land to which the Lord had directed them. They were both so rich in sheep and cattle that they could no longer share the same grazing land, and their servants were getting into fistfights over grazing rights. Abraham decided that he would give the first choice of grazing land to Lot. Lot noticed how rich the deeply wicked cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were, and what fertile land was near them, and he decided that he would choose that land for his herds. There was nothing to admire about those horrid cities except their wealth, but Lot deeply admired wealth. He was a wealthy man in his old age, and had no intention of risking that wealth merely to keep apart from evil. Psalm 84:10 sings "I had rather be the doorkeeper in God's house than to dwell in the tents of wickedness", but that's not how Lot saw things in his old age. He had worldly prosperity, and had come to think of such prosperity as his right, not to be risked merely for the sake of serving the Lord as faithfully as possible. Rather than risk loss of wealth, he risked loss of righteousness, and chose to live in the midst of the deep evils practiced by the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Without quite realizing it, Lot had fallen into idolatry, loving created things more than the Creator.

Abraham did otherwise. He was willing to risk living in inferior grazing land rather than risk living in the midst of inferior morals. For this, the Lord blessed him, saying "I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if a man can count the dust of the earth, then shall your descendants be counted" (Genesis 13:16).

God, in His mercy, wanted to save Lot from falling into the evil ways of Sodom and Gomorrah. As God sent a storm and a whale to pull Jonah back to the right path, so God sent war to pull Lot out of the deadly moral trap of Sodom and Gomorrah. Those cities and their neighbors revolted against their violent overlord, and he sent troops to beat them into submission. As the overlord's troops ravaged the lands of Sodom and Gomorrah, they captured Lot and all his family, servants, and possessions. Abraham was a tough old man, still hard and fit, and came immediately to his cousin's rescue. Abraham had 300 sturdy young men in his employ, and they were loyal to their boss. He armed them and led them on an entirely successful surprise attack. Lot, with his servants, family, and goods, was rescued.

God graciously gave Lot a perfect opportunity to get away from Sodom and Gomorrah, and all of the evils openly and enthusiastically practiced there. Instead, he went back, determined to grow richer through business with wealthy Sodom and Gomorrah.

Abraham again, acted quite otherwise. Lot did not give thanks to God, but Abraham did, bringing a tithe of his spoils to the mysterious priest-king Melchizedek. As priest and king, Melchizedek was a distant foreshadowing of our Lord Jesus Christ, King of Kings and Eternal

High Priest. When he blessed Abraham with bread and wine, he foreshadowed the Lord Jesus Christ blessing us with the bread and wine of the Holy Eucharist, His veiled and life giving, Sacramental Presence, until He comes again in glory. At this moment, the Lord made Abraham our father in faith, the spiritual ancestor of all of those who are called through Faith to Eternal Life. Abraham became the spiritual father of redeemed humanity, seeing Salvation from afar.

But for Sodom and Gomorrah, time was up. God, having made Abraham the spiritual ancestor of redeemed humanity, gave Abraham the tremendous privilege of knowing what He intended to do. Abraham, having once rescued Lot by his strong arms, now rescued Lot by his strong prayers. Abraham interceded with God for Lot, begging the Lord not to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah for Lot's sake. You all just heard today's first reading, a lesson from Genesis (18:20-32). At Abraham's request, God promised not to destroy the two wicked cities if even ten good people could be found therein. Ten good people could not be found therein. God, in justice, would blot them out; but, in mercy towards Abraham, God would spare Lot himself and his immediate family. "It came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that GOD REMEMBERED ABRAHAM, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when he overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt" (Genesis 19:29)

Lot, in prosperous old age, became double minded. Abraham, even in prosperous old age, did not; and his single minded prayers were of saving benefit to his double minded cousin.

We live in a civilization that is very nearly obsessed with ethics, and the great majority of us are quite convinced that we are pretty good people. I think that this is not the time and place to get into detail, but, although it talks incessantly about ethics, our civilization is deeply entangled in some truly evil things. Perhaps many of us, not directly involved in evil things but still closer to them than we care to admit, are much like Lot. Not practicing evil things ourselves, we don't mind getting wealthier through cooperation with evil. If we have investment accounts, for example, have we looked closely at exactly what we own? I do know that some church organizations have been horrified to discover what companies they own stock in through their investment accounts, and what evil things some of those companies are doing. Some of our civilization's wealthiest corporations are involved in evils that make Sodom and Gomorrah look innocent. Would we be willing to risk loss of wealth from disinvesting from such corporations? Perhaps we wouldn't actually lose much or any wealth - who knows? - but would we be willing to take the risk?

No one is an authentic Christian at all who is mainly motivated by considerations of worldly advantage. No one is a fully authentic Christian without being willing to sacrifice worldly pleasures, comforts, luxuries, or honors, for the service of God. This actually requires more grace and deeper love of God as we grew older, and more accustomed to a certain level of comfort and security. When it comes to grace and love, especially, the Lord Jesus' Gospel words apply. The Father will give the Holy Spirit to those who ask.

So, let us ask.

May the Holy Spirit turn our hearts from love of this present world to love of God in, with, and through, Christ our Savior, in Whom we have sure hope of Eternal Life.

Amen.